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To Make a Prairie

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TO MAKE A PRAIRIE

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Signature Linda Kay Somerville

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ABSTRACT

Diaries, letters, and journals have come to be accepted as valid literary forms, offering personal insights into an event or a way of life which the more public accounts afforded by the history books have treated lightly or not at all. The settling of Dakota Territory about one hundred years ago provides an opportunity to present the personal perspectives of a number of pioneers as contained in their diaries, letters, and reminiscences. In particular, the women who participated actively and fully in this venture have not been given due recognition for their contributions to the settlement of the plains. Historical accounts have had a tendency to ignore their role, significant though it was, and fiction has tended to trivialize their part through a heavy application of sentimentality.

An examination of pioneer women's diaries, letters, and recollections quickly dispels any notions that their responsibilities were of lesser import than their male counterparts'. Women toiled alongside their menfolk in the homesteading effort and shared equally in the sorrows and the joys. The writings of these women supply a voice that up until quite recently has seldom been heard. They offer a point of view about a particular period (primarily 1880

to 1910) and a particular place (that part of Dakota Territory which eventually became the State of North Dakota).

Inferences have been made about the accounts of pioneer living as experienced and expressed by these women, and an attempt has been made to convey a sense of the past: the dailiness of their lives, their insights, their thoughts and feelings. The writings present us with a seldom told story by the women who lived it.

INTRODUCTION

> To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
> One clover, and a bee,
> And revery.
> The revery alone will do,
> If bees are few.
>
> --Emily Dickinson

"To make a prairie" a place habitable took much more than "a clover and one bee," at least for the scores of pioneers who came to settle a prairie less fanciful than the one to which Emily Dickinson was referring. It took hard work; perseverance in the face of blizzards, fires, crop failures due to drought, grasshoppers, and early frost; the fortitude to endure isolation and the incredible loneliness it created; and courage--the courage to gamble on a new way of life.

Thousands came. "From 1878 to 1890 the population of North Dakota increased by more than 1,000 per cent--from an estimated 16,000 to 191,000" (Robinson, p. 134). Men, women, and children, the majority from Norway and Canada, came as well as immigrants from Germany, Ireland, Sweden, England, and Russia, some having settled first in various parts of Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin before moving west. However, by 1890, 43 per cent of the State's population

was foreign born with an additional 26 per cent being the children of foreign parents (Robinson, p. 146).

They came (the ones with oceans to cross) by boat, by train, by covered wagon, by whatever means they had--a latter-day gold rush of sorts. Only in this instance the "gold" was land, free land.

> Under the Homestead Act, the settler was given 160 acres for living on the land and cultivating a portion of it for five years. He paid fees of fourteen dollars (eighteen dollars if it was within railroad land grant) when he made the original entry on the land and four dollars (eight within the land grant) when he made final proof of title. A law passed in 1880 permitted a settler to commute the homestead after six months' residence, that is, secure title immediately by paying cash at the same rate as under the Preemption Law.
>
> Under terms of the Timber Culture Act of 1873, the settler could acquire 160 acres of land by planting 10 acres of it in trees. When making a final proof on a tree claim at the end of eight years, he had to have 675 living trees on each of the ten acres. He paid an entry fee of fourteen dollars but did not have to satisfy a residence requirement. (Robinson, pp. 148-149)

Historians, novelists, biographers, and reporters have all written volumes about "how the West was won," accounts of cowboys and Indians, adventure and adversity, primarily from a male perspective. But there is another voice which too often has remained silent, imprisoned within the confines of women's diaries and letters, a source untapped and forgotten, reminiscences in musty attics, in old trunks, on the shelves of a son's or daughter's closet. It is these women's voices I wish to raise, women who accompanied parents and husbands, women who came alone to an unsettled land and wrote down their thoughts and feelings, recorded the dailiness of their lives, and registered--in a world sometimes prone to forget--their existence, their invaluable contribution to a historic endeavor.

Pick up all but the most recent history textbooks and scan the tables of contents. Chapter headings reveal as much as the text: "Men of Action," "The White Man's Culture," "Founding Fathers," and "Plainsmen and Mountain Men," to name a few. Then flip to the indexes: If there is a category entitled "Women," there will usually be two references--one to temperance and one to suffrage. Pictures in these same texts will include men working on the railroad, men during cattle round-up, men doing the threshing, men out hunting, and finally men in front of their sod shanties or tar paper shacks, surrounded by their families--a drab, unsmiling wife and a brood of unsmiling children.[1] Next peruse the prose of the same books, and

the women are practically invisible: "On reaching his claim, the settler's first concern was to have a roof over his head" (Schell, p. 176). Those texts that do mention the pioneer women frequently cover the subject in two or three paragraphs as compared to hundreds of pages devoted to "man's" movement west.[2]

Fiction about the pioneer experience often trivializes the experience with sentimentality, as in numerous versions of Little House on the Prairie. Regardless of the hardships or heartbreak, the little family rallies round one another and a lesson is learned, a good deed performed. Cather's My Antonia and O Pioneers and Rolvaag's Giants in the Earth are but a few of the too few novels which give a more realistic interpretation of the life and people of the prairie, an interpretation of private, domestic affairs as opposed to history's primary focus on public affairs. It should be remembered, however, that these works of fiction, regardless of quality, often derive their details of reference from diaries and reminiscences.

In the Collections of the State Historical Society, Volume VII, there is a section on "Biographical Sketches of North Dakota Pioneers," all six of whom are men. There is also a section entitled "Pioneer Experiences." Of the seventeen experiences recorded, one is written by a woman. In a random search of the North Dakota Quarterly, only two articles are on pioneer women or a related subject.[3] And so it goes.

Everett Dick notes the omission in The Sod House Frontier:

> Although the life of woman on the plains was rude and hard, her position was legally, educationally, and socially, higher than in the more conservative East. Nevertheless in man's story of the conquest of the prairies, woman is given scant credit for her part. In prairie grass cemeteries in unmarked, forgotten graves sunken with the passing of time, lies the heroines of the far-flung vanguard of permanent civilization, the Marys, Hannahs, Margarets, and Sarahs. (Dick, p. 236)

What qualified these women to be called heroines? They were, all of them, ordinary mortals and did not have to their credit any acts of extraordinary valour or martial achievement. They were not then considered remarkable nor do we now attribute them with great and noble deeds requiring superhuman powers. Their heroism was of a different sort, quieter and more sustained. The prairie was their battlefield where they waged daily assaults on the land, the elements, the loneliness. To do so required strength, stamina, and greatness of soul in heroic proportions though the women probably would have been embarrassed to hear themselves so described and would have shrugged their shoulders and replied, "We did what had to be done, that's all."

In the graves may be interred the bones of these heroines; however, their words live on, rising up from yellowed pages to tell their stories.

The stories will emanate from three sources: diaries and letters written at the time of the events they describe, reminiscences written by these pioneer women in their later years, and reminiscences gathered by Works Progress Administration (WPA) field workers through the interview process for the Historical Data Project in the 1930's. Of the three, the first is the most reliable and perhaps the most interesting as well as being in shortest supply; the second, while extremely enjoyable and informative reading, is suspect by reason of the tricks time can play in memory with past events; and the third has been filtered through another's perceptions and, depending on the interviewer's skills, may have altered the pioneer's words and robbed us of some of its authentic charm.

The three, taken together, convey a sense of what sounds authentic and what does not. They seem to substantiate one another, not infrequently surfacing the same names and telling of events among women living in close proximity to one another. For instance, the recounting of Mrs. John Frundt freezing to death during a winter blizzard occurs in the narrative of at least two of the pioneer women. Each in its own way gives a glimpse of what it was like.

There are those, of course, who question the authenticity and reliability of such accounts. "One person's

perceptions of a particular experience cannot be relied upon," they say, forgetting that the actualities of domestic history are best known from particular accounts, accounts which were eventually written down by one person. Historians, in fact, have relied to a very large degree on one diarist, Samuel Pepys, for a rendition of life in and around London during the 1600's. In like manner, it would seem there should be a legitimate place for the jottings of women's experiences on the prairie or elsewhere. Those too can provide trustworthy insights to future generations.

Throughout, I have attempted to select material which will best allow these women to speak for themselves, simply and straightforwardly defining their reality as they saw it and as they lived it.

Too often, I think, the pioneer woman's experience is reduced to one of drudgery, death, and despair. And there is no question but what these women were well-acquainted with hard work and grief. Bread to bake, babies to tend, fields to break, clothes to mend and sew--the list of chores was endless. Yet for those who came and stayed, there were at least moments of pleasure--gazing out the sod-hut door on a marvelous panoply of wild prairie blooms, enjoying a neighbor's visit, going to town, attending a dance, planning a picnic, especially for the 4th of July. These too were parts of their lives. And any retelling of these experiences should reflect that balance, the good times and the bad. For some, life was admittedly easier--fewer crop failures,

more money, less tragedy. For others, it was indeed a hard life--years of scraping along, making do, patching on top of patches, coping with sickness and death. But the writings do not cast things as all one way or the other; the pages speak of joy and sorrow, not unlike the pages of our own contemporary lives. They were but different times with different constraints. But perhaps the most admirable and the most outstanding characteristic of these pioneer women was this: that despite the hardships and there were many; despite the tragedies, and they were ever-present; these women found ways to survive, spirits unbroken, imbued with the strength to seek beauty, make music, organize churches, teach school, and just plain live. Indeed, they deserve our admiration and respect, but never our pity.

But enough, such praise would embarrass them, I suspect. They wait . . . their own story to tell.

CHAPTER I

ONE CLOVER, AND A BEE: DIARIES AND LETTERS

I recall the time, a number of years ago, when a brother-in-law returned from a trip taken alone across the Outback in Australia. He brought back with him a journal of his experiences, and he allowed me to read of them. After closing up the notebook, I remember sitting there with a lump in my throat, a sense of reverence at having been allowed a glimpse inside Ken, his thoughts and his feelings, a chance to learn not only what the trip was like but what he was like. Similar feelings stir as I read the diaries and journals of pioneer women from near places but faraway times. It is a privilege to be allowed access to their thoughts and feelings, to see from a perspective seldom captured in history books and most always transformed by works of fiction.

These women were not famous; they were not even the wives of famous men. The question might reasonably be asked as to what value their words are. For one thing, they are the words of real people, with names and personalities, words written for a variety of reasons, some known only to the author. Whether it be to have a record of events ["Well, today we will begin to build a house on my farm" (Olstad, n.p.)][4] or to afford a means of self-expression

["After marriage I became the unknown wife of a well-known man. I dropped the three R's for three W's--work, work, work. . . (Morgan, n.p.).], there is much to be learned, new perspectives to be explored from so intimate a look at these lives. For these lives--the lives of women on the prairie--have to a large extent gone unrecorded. Marshall Davidson, in his Life in America, speaks of a German novelist describing the 19th century emigration in this way: ". . . band after band came down over the mountain with bag and baggage, with wife and child. . ." (Davidson, p. 409). There's but one tiny comma separating the wife and child from the bag and baggage, and too often the impression left behind has been that the women and children were, in fact, part of the bag and baggage, just one more burden for the men following a dream.

Yet these personal accounts make it very clear that women were partners in the enterprise of converting wild prairie into cultivated farmland, complete with homes and towns and a social structure. In fact, women were at a premium; in most instances, a man who had come alone either found a woman to be his wife and helpmate or he left. Women took primary responsibility for the home--they cooked and baked and sewed and mended and cleaned and tended babies. They also maintained gardens and canned the produce from those gardens. Often as not, they worked alongside their husbands in the fields during planting and harvest, and they helped with the care of the livestock. When the hus-

band hauled grain to town, usually a two- or three-day trip there and back, or when he worked out to supplement their meager income, it was the woman who assumed full responsibility for the homestead, sometimes fighting fires, occasionally contending with Indians, and handling all the chores, inside and out, by herself and unassisted, save for the limited help of little hands, those of her offspring.

Somewhere in their crowded days, which began with the first rays of morning light and ended with the fading glow of twilight, some of these women found time to write--letters to friends and relatives back home, diaries directed to no one in particular, journals containing detailed descriptions of new places, new people, new problems. Such is the stuff of autobiography, and diaries, letters, and journals have come to be recognized as autobiographical writings, revealing something about an individual, actuality, actions there, and a sense of surroundings. The women wrote about what they know best--themselves and their experiences.

The best way to capture a sense of their presence, of course, is to hold the old, musty book, its binding weakened by the years, its pages yellowed and the ink faded, in one's own hands and slowly turn the pages of another person's life. An afternoon can slip away as one transports oneself back to a shack on a windswept prairie to share the joys and sorrows of another's experience, to seek answers to the question, "What was it like?"

Andrew Nahum and Sarah Elizabeth Canfield both kept diaries of their experiences in North Dakota and Montana, during which time Andrew served as an officer in the Regular Army. Sarah, if she can be called a pioneer woman at all, came to Dakota Territory to be near her new husband. A typed copy of her diary entries covering 1867-68 reveals an educated, articulate woman taking pains to describe what she saw, giving a glimpse of military life at a fort, and, to a certain extent, recording her impressions. Far more descriptive than most of her prairie counterparts (the diary was, in fact, used by Bess Streeter Aldrich in The Lieutenant's Lady),[5] Sarah offers an interesting contrast to the remainder of the autobiographical material that will be examined in this paper. Her prose is a bit more polished, though she punctuates loosely. She displays more of a self-conscious awareness that what she writes down may be read by others, and consequently she seeks to impart certain information about the place and the people living there. That may even have been her purpose in keeping a journal. As an army wife, her very position made her a spectator and an outsider, one on whom family and friends, temporarily left behind in Iowa, would no doubt rely for personal accounts of her venture into uncivilized territory.

The opening paragraph of Sarah's first entry dated April 30, 1866, reads as follows: "I now open a new chapter in my diary, and begin a new life. Was married today. My husband is an officer in the Regular Army" (Canfield, p.

1).[6] Hers is not a daily chronicle. A week, two weeks, sometimes a month will go by before another entry appears. Sarah was quickly initiated into the unpredictability of army life. At the time of their marriage, her husband was stationed in New York on Governor's Island. A month later he was on his way to Fort Leavenworth, and before Sarah could join him, his orders had been changed to Fort Berthold in Dakota Territory because "the Indians are very troublesome now" (Canfield, p. 1). On May 30, Sarah wrote: "If he should winter at Ft. Randall or near enough for me to go while the boats are running I shall go to him, otherwise I shall have to wait until Spring" (Canfield, p. 1).

Wait until spring she did, with only letters, a month or more in coming, to comfort her back in Iowa. It was not until March 23, 1867, that she took the train to Omaha, Nebraska, where she boarded a boat for Fort Berthold. Four days later she was on board the Deer Lodge and starting her long journey north. Sarah shared a stateroom with Lt. Hogan's wife, ". . . an Irishwoman, witty, well-educated, and very companionable" (Canfield, p. 3). She goes on:

> The ladies [There were five other women on board.] have seats at the Captain's table with the officers of the boat. The food is good and well cooked. The Steward, cooks, and waiters are all colored men. The boat's crew of about 30 men seem to be about evenly divided as to color, nor do they seem to observe the amenaties of polite

> life for I heard the dinner call on the lower deck. It was the word "Grubpile" repeated three or four times--but it seemed to have the desired effect if one were to judge from the clatter of dishes which immediately followed.
> The river is very high and very muddy. We stopped at Sioux City today and bought gingham for sunbonnets. The ladies having previously held a council of war (we belong to the Army now and use military terms) and decided if we wanted to stay out on deck much we must have them for the sun shines on the water very brightly. (Canfield, pp. 3-4)

Sarah is observant, commenting on the quality of the food and the make-up of the crew, as well as displaying an awareness of her choice of words, inserting the parenthetical to explain her use of "council of war." By April 13, the boat has passed Fort Pierre, and in Sarah's opinion,

> This is a worse country than I ever dreamed of, nothing but hills of dry sand--with little streaks of short shriveled grass in the hollows and on the river bottoms. We saw several large droves of antelope today--I suppose several hundred in all. And just before night a large gray wolf came down to the river bank to see us pass--We saw three Indians yesterday but nothing like a human today.

(Canfield, p. 5)

Sarah is quite direct about her impressions of this foreign land and its inhabitants. The country is terrible, better defined as "hills of dry sand" with "little streaks of short shriveled grass in the hollows and the river bottoms." She sees "large droves of antelope"--"several hundred in all"--and a "large gray wolf." Not elaborate detail, but a brief report of what she was experiencing. Her comment about the Indians is not so much a reflection on the Native Americans as a recognition that they, uncivilized though they may be in her eyes, relieve the uncivilized nature of the surrounding landscape.

On April 15 she has her first taste of native cuisine. "We saw more antelopes today. One of the men shot one and we had cutlets for supper. It was fine, tender as chicken breast and of a delicious flavor. We have also had a mess of elk meat but did not like that very well" (Canfield, p. 5). Likening the antelope to the more familiar chicken breasts provides a point of reference for Sarah's family and friends back home.

Every day is not filled with new and exciting adventure, however. The journey is tedious in many respects, and Sarah is anxious to reach her destination:

> The country is getting wilder the bluffs higher and are often on both sides of the river and the current is swifter as we go north, still the water

> is low and we have had to "double trip" twice. That is we unloaded some of our cargo on the river bank went some little distance up stream where we unloaded some more and returned for the first, and taking on the second on our way north. It all takes so much time, a whole day will sometimes be spent to travel a few miles and I am getting anxious to end my journey. We have now been three weeks on the boat and life is getting monotonous. We read, sew, talk, and in the evening we sometimes dance a little as there is a piano on board and two of the ladies are fine musicians. (Canfield, p. 6)

Commas may be omitted and sentences may run together or be left incomplete, but the experience is reported. The going is slow against the Missouri's currents, the days are long, and Sarah's patience exhausted. Her tone is one of weariness and exasperation with a repetitive process: "three weeks," "a whole day to cover a few miles." She states her feelings without embellishment--"life is getting monotonous."

In many ways Sarah's was a "typical" pioneering experience. She notices the wildlife--the antelopes and the wolves--displays an underlying fear of the Indians, and indicates a reliance on the customs of her world.

> The wild flowers are beginning to bloom, and today when the boat stopped to cut wood, we went ashore and gathered a few but the gentlemen armed themselves and acted as our escort, even though we did not go very far from the boat--for wild Indians are all around us. We do not often see them, but we know they are near for this morning about daylight as our boat was just starting from where it had been tied to the bank all night, (we run all night when the moon shines and the water good) the pilot was shot at his post in the pilot house. As he was shot with arrows no one knew it until he was found. The Captain says he will leave the body at Ft. Rice tomorrow for burial. (Canfield, p. 6)

She was close here to the event, to what must have been a sharp, even traumatic shock. She reports it in brief and without emotion, though comment and elaboration may have occurred in the talk on the boat. It is only as one reads on in the next paragraph under the same date that one gets an inkling of the tension and the terror she may be feeling. Three letters from Mr. C. (Sarah usually refers to her husband in formal terms--"my husband," "Mr. C." or "Lt. C," with only an occasional reference to "Nahum") found on the river-bank while they were ashore, make her fear for his safety. "The date of the latest letter was early in January

nearly four months ago, and what might not happen in four months, for I had not had a letter for a month or more when I left home. I had a hard cry over my letters but Capt. Ohlman told me not to worry, but if anything had happened to my husband, he would bring me back home all right which is very kind of him" (Canfield, p. 7). The language reflects a kind of stoicism which is common among those brave enough to embark on such an adventure in the first place. A young bride, journeying alone to wild and woolly country, to meet a husband she has not heard from in four months, demonstrates remarkable calm in describing her circumstances.

In her May 19 entry she allows a little excitement to creep into her prose. "This is Sunday and a very beautiful day. I am out on deck pretending to read but my mind is not on my reading very much for the Captain has just told me that he hopes to reach Ft. Berthold to-night. Is my dear Husband alive? Am I indeed to see him soon? I am very anxious but am determined to appear calm as possible" (Canfield, p. 7). How easy it is to identify with her attempts to belie the nature and extent of her real feelings. One can picture Sarah seated on the deck, supposedly deeply engrossed in her reading matter, only to be miles away in her thoughts. In just a few words, Sarah recreates a very common behavioral posture that at the same time allows a reader to get a sense of her unexpressed feelings.

In like manner, she describes her long-awaited meeting with her husband, telling just enough to convey her joy at

being reunited with him. "I left the boat and went through the 'Sallyport' into the two rooms 'Uncle Sam' allows a 1st Lieut. to occupy and am at home with my dear husband. We have spent the day talking. . . . Our two rooms are very neat and cosy. One is a sitting room which contains a centre table, an army cot for a sofa covered with a buffalo robe which is beautifully decorated on the flesh side with bright colors, a shelf of books, three chairs and a writing desk. The other is a bedroom neatly and plainly furnished both rooms are carpeted" (Canfield, p. 8). It is a touching and tasteful description, if somewhat understated, of a long-awaited reunion.

What interests Sarah most, of course, and what she devotes much of her attention to in her journal entries are the Indians. The remnants of three tribes--"the Mandans, the Arickarees, and the Gsovonters [sic]" (Canfield, p. 9)--reside in a village nearby, about 2000 strong. "Looking down on the village there are no streets nor plan in its arrangement. Looks as if the 'teepees' had been dropped from a height and landed anywhere they happened to. They are built by driving a row of poles in the ground in a circle then drawing the tops almost together leaving a small opening for the escape of smoke, brush is piled over the poles then covered with dirt except in one place which is left open with a buffalo skin hung for a door. All the light is from the smoke hole in the center" (Canfield, p. 9). With visual imagery Sarah finds a way to keep the scene

before her. Dangling participles notwithstanding and "rows" of poles that somehow form circles, Sarah has given some insight into an Indian world.

Three days after arriving, Sarah is out walking in the village, absorbing as much of her new and strange surroundings as possible. The way in which the Indians dispose of their dead intrigues her: "They sew or tie the bodies up in the buffalo skin and place it on a platform perhaps ten feet above the ground where they remain until the platform falls down which in this dry climate is a long time" (Canfield, pp. 9-10). It is interesting to note she is not judgmental about the cultural differences. She does not term the custom barbaric nor does she make any editorial comment at all.

A similar objectivity is used in describing the role differences between men and women, differences Sarah has no trouble identifying. Once again, however, she refrains from editorializing, allowing her concrete descriptions of what she sees to tell the story. She states facts; the reader may make value judgments based on those facts. "We saw a good many men and boys amusing themselves in various ways--such as racing, horse racing, & playing ball. But the women do not seem to have any amusements. . ." (Canfield, p. 10). Instead, the squaws, as Sarah refers to the Indian women, are engaged in work--preparing a buffalo robe or planting corn, both processes fully described by Sarah. In another place, Sarah remarks, "The women do all the

work" (Canfield, p. 12).

Her introduction to the cultural differences in courtship is abrupt and somewhat humorous. "I was awakened last night by a great screeching, groaning, and a series of, to me, distressing sounds together with a great barking of dogs. Mr. C. assured me I need not be alarmed. It is he said, only a young warrior serenading or making love to his chosen one" (Canfield, p. 10).

Sarah's eyes miss very little; her comments attest to her being a careful observer, one who makes note of small details. She attends a "pow-wow" in the mess hall with Captain O. and tells of the opening ritual: "Coffee was served the peace pipe was lighted, and passed in perfect silence from one to another, and then solemnly passed back to the first. Then the talks began" (Canfield, p. 11). Nor does she neglect the participants: "The costume of the Chiefs seemed to be buffalo robes, beads and moccasins, though one wore a large string of bear claws for a necklace. The robes were only held by the hands and had a way of slipping down and displaying their splendid brown shoulders. They were magnificent specimens of manhood" (Canfield, p. 11). Sarah's attention to a shifting robe, "splendid brown shoulders," and "magnificent specimens of manhood" suggests a writer of greater sophistication than most of the women who found themselves in North Dakota. Similar admiration of the male physique is seldom, if ever, alluded to by a Norwegian or German immigrant woman. References to the body

or bodily functions are carefully concealed and, if mentioned at all, are usually referred to in a euphemistic way. There is nary a word about outhouses, menstruation, or sexual activity, not even a stolen kiss. Further on, May Robert will reveal a yearning for her young man but it will be in cipher, and Louisa Wanner will admit to sleeping in the same room with her Will, followed by the most direct reference to human sexuality contained in these diaries and reminiscences: "towards morning W. came to bed with me" (Wanner, p. 22). For the most part, however, these women are reserved and concerned with propriety. In Sarah's case, of course, her role as a spectator allows her to look without fear--the detached observer.

In Sarah's exploration of a strange people in a strange land, she wanders about the village one day, "followed by a number of little Indians of both sexes. I soon discovered that I was a curiosity to them for often they ran in front of us and peering into my face which was somewhat hidden by my sunbonnet, then dodge back laughing and chattering as though it was great fun. I wished I could understand what they were saying" (Canfield, p. 11). Sarah visits one of the teepees in which lives a white man with his squaw and a family of children. She describes the interior of the lodging with care, noting furnishings (or lack thereof), the large kettle hanging over the fire containing today's dinner, and the "calico gown very much soiled" worn by their hostess (Canfield, p. 12). Commenting on the children's

attire, she says, "The costume of the children was in two or three cases less than even the traditional fig leaf but having either an innate sense of the proprieties or from timidity they kept back in the shadows and only occasionally would I have a glimpse of a copper colored skin as it flitted from one bundle of skins to another" (Canfield, p. 12). (Piles of buffalo, beaver, and deer skins served as lounging chairs.) Summing up her day: "We saw many sights some of them very disgusting--some pathetic. I wish I could teach them better ways of living. . . . They are very superstitious" (Canfield, pp. 12-13). Postulating an editorial comment at last, Sarah reflects the thinking of her times--the unquestionable superiority of the white man's ways and the patronizing attitude toward a "less-civilized" people. She describes some of their barbarous customs, what Sarah describes as "the way they make warriors [probably part of the sundance ritual], whereby slits are cut in the skin of a young warrior just under the shoulder blades and a pole strong enough to bear his weight is inserted, and he is allowed to hang until the strips of skin tear free" (Canfield, p. 13). Or the celebration dance held after a battle victory or a harvest which Sarah termed "the most ridiculous sight I ever saw" (Canfield, p. 15).

Barely a month after her arrival, June 26, Sarah's husband is ordered to report for duty at Camp Cooke, Montana Territory. Thus her stay in Dakota Territory comes to a close though her journal continues with sporadic entries

for the next year, detailing life at another fort in more dangerous country, so dangerous in fact she is finally forced to go back to Iowa, the last entry dated June 14, 1868.

Almost ten years pass before we pick up the thread of another life, this time through the letters of Maria Larrabee, the first one dated August, 1876. Maria's husband, William H. Larrabee, had arrived in D. T. November 13, 1875, and was a member of Company L, Seventh Cavalry stationed at Fort Totten. He apparently deserted, was tried and sentenced to two years' confinement as a result of a court-martial conducted in April, 1876. The Post Returns of September 22, 1876, under Special Order No. 1181, carries the following notation: "Discharges Prisoner Wm. H. Larrabee."[7]

Maria's first of nine letters to an unidentified "Patty" explains why.

> Dear Patty:--
>
> At last after travelling by rail, prairie schooner, and ox team we arrived at Fort Totten to find that--Wm's trial was on and he was found guilty and sentenced to two years in a Federal prison.
>
> I was simply crushed but--after talking things over with our friends here and taking their advice we got his sentence changed to ten years of life on the prairie; so my dear we will not

> see you for ten years for we are going to live somewhere not very far from where we now are.
>
> General L. C. Hunt is in command at Fort Totten and last winter several cavalery regiments were quartered here.
>
> We have just received word that Custer and the L troops of the 7th Cav. were all massacred June 20, 1876.
>
> This was one of the regiments quartered here last winter. We are all feeling frightened and dismayed about it.
>
> The Indians are restless and dissatisfied and are feeling very much elated over their victory. (Larrabee, Aug. 1876)

Better, it would appear, to "endure" a ten-year sentence on the prairie than to serve a two-year sentence in a stockade, faint praise for prairie living. As was Sarah, so is Maria quite articulate though she too punctuates sparingly and writes occasional run-on sentences. Her allusion to Custer's Last Stand on the Little Big Horn is an extraordinary example of understatement, particularly in light of the fact her husband William would have been with that regiment had he not been imprisoned at the time. An event which has been told and retold, has filled many books, and has been analyzed by historians, psychologists, and war strategists warrants but three short sentences by someone who was "on the scene" at the time it happened. She admits

to "feeling frightened and dismayed," but the folks back home are not apt to identify the event as a history-making one by Maria's description. Of course, how many of us are aware of the historical, scientific, or artistic significance of events in our daily lives. Then too the famous (or infamous) battle took place far from Fort Totten in a day when distances made even more of a difference. It may have seemed somewhat removed from her daily activities, accounting for her laconic treatment of the event. Whatever the reason, Mary, in as few words as possible, writes of a tragedy that but for fate (There, but for the grace of God. . . .) would have directly included her. To someone acquainted with the ramifications of this important battle, her few words in reference to it take on added intensity and appreciation for the irony.

The next month Mary writes to Patty using the pen name Caroline H. for some unknown reason, and so she continues to sign her correspondence thereafter. The Larrabees have moved about thirty miles from Fort Totten by this time, having bought out the claim of a Joseph Hay and begun "serving their sentence." Mary (alias Caroline) takes pains to describe their surroundings and the wild life that inhabits them. She likens sand hill cranes to herds of cattle (from a distance at least), in an effort to provide her eastern friend with a common reference. She refers to her husband throughout in respectful and formal terms--Mr. Larrabee.

Dakota Terr'y Sept--1876

Dear Patty:--

A beautiful September day and at last we have left the post and are settled on the Fort Totten trail about thirty miles from Fort Totten. Mr. Larrabee bought out a man by the name of Joseph Hay who owned a log house near the James River Valley.

The valley is sheltered by hills and is open to the east where the waters of Lake Belland come into the river through a little creek. It is a good place for raising stock and that is Mr. Larrabees intention. We will also keep the relay station where the mail carriers and freighters can keep their relay horses.

Let me describe our surroundings. To the east lies Lake Belland a nice little sheet of water with a few trees on the north and south shores. On the south and north the hills shut off the view. The river runs out of the valley to the west.

Mr. Larrabee is very busy; making hay and getting in supplies. The relay station will use up huge quantities of this for all the supplies to Fort Totten and the Indian Agency go by our door along this trail.

Herds of antelope pass near grazing as they go

for in this valley is fine grass and running water, which is not often to be found, for you may travel miles upon the prairie without finding water. The geese and ducks and prairie chickens are here in immense numbers and sometimes they cover vast spaces. The sand hill cranes look at a distance like huge herds of cattle.

About the lake is the breeding place of the ducks and they will remain until the frosts send them southward.

You asked me about the buffalo. There are no buffalo here now as they left the region about Devils Lake about 1868. They used to be very numerous about here as the grass is good and there is plenty of water but the Indians and Red River halfbreeds became so numerous and hunted them so persistantly that they went west and south. They [illegible] of their flesh in immense quantities and sold it to the Hudson Bay and American Fur Companies.

With love

Caroline H

(Larrabee, Sept. 1876)

Nine months lapse before we again hear from Mary, and her tone has changed somewhat. She has endured a winter in Dakota Territory, given birth to a son without the assistance of a doctor or a midwife, become acquainted with

some Indians, and has the dubious distinction of being the only white woman in Foster County. "Oh, how homesick I get for the sight of a white woman's face," she writes. The Indian visitors alternately irritate ("We always have to give them lunch when they come as they will remain until they are fed.") and repel ("You can imagine my disgust as this was the first time that I knew that they ate dogs."). Still the beauty of the wild flowers is not lost on her, as she digs out the old botany book to identify the Pasque flowers, even embellishing her description with a bit of metaphor, "with their quaint furry hoods."

Dakota Terr. May 24, 1877

Dear Patty

We have no neighbors nearer than Fort Totten except the Indians who visit us frequently and so far as I know I am the only white woman in Foster County.

We have a new baby at our house, a boy, which we have named Berkley Terry Larrabee whose arrival on the 12th was very much dreaded by me because we had no doctors or nurses.

This baby so far as we know is the first white child born in Foster County.

The little girls have come in with their hands full of some beautiful flowers and wanted to know what they were called. Hunting out my old Botany I found that they were the Pasque flowers with

their quaint furry hoods which cover the buds. The hills are covered with them and as they begin to bloom so early there is no grass and the leaves come after the flower. We welcomed them eagerly as they are the first but we will have an abundance of wild flowers all summer long.

The lake is full of fish and as they go up Slummegullion Creek (so named by me because its such a tiny stream beside our creeks at home), [illegible] we get numbers which are a welcome change in our menu though they are not so fine as the salt water fish at home.

Oh, how homesick I get for the sight of a white soman's [sic] face. I have seen none since I came here in September. The Indian women visit us frequently.

Five came a few days ago. One is always the spokeswoman and introduces the others by pointing to them, "this Lizzie" this Fanny" this Mary" [sic].

We always have to give them lunch when they come as they will remain until they are fed.

We had five or six fat little puppies and Mr. Larrabee gave each of them one which was received with broad smiles and great pleasure. I was glad he had given them something that pleased them so much and mentioned it to William after they were

gone--when he replied nonchanlently "Oh yes, they will make them into a pot of soup." you can imagine my disgust as this was the first time that I knew that they ate dogs.

Caroline H.

(Larrabee, May 24, 1877)

With fall approaching, Patty hears again from Mary. The Larrabees have moved, and so Mary once more describes their new surroundings, including a new six-room frame house and the relay station they will continue to operate. Perhaps a summer has helped, or the move, or maybe the new house. At any rate, Mary's spirits are higher and she makes but one comment about her aloneness:

This station is very isolated there being no settlements west of Fargo and for that reason it is very difficult to get anyone to live there. (Larrabee, Sept. 1877)

Dakota Terr'y, Sep 1877

Dear Patience:--

Have just got settled after moving. We moved about a mile south of our last habitation.

Mr. Larrabee has built a 6 room frame house the first one in the county where we will be much more comfortable than in the old log house. He will move all the buildings here and there we will keep our relay station.

It is in the bottom of the valley on the banks of the river James and is much more sheltered. The round topped hills are on the north and west and cut off our view but to the south it is open with gently rolling prairy in the direction of the river. The trail travels along this rolling land towards the river which is called the James.

Mr. Larrabee is busy getting in hay and getting in supplies and we will be very busy for we intend keeping a relay house here and he will need a great deal of [provender] to supply the animals.

Herds of antelopes pass near grazing as they go, for in this valley is fine grass and running water which is not often to be found for you may travel miles upon the prairie without finding water.

The geese and ducks are here in immense numbers and sometimes there are so many that they cover vast spaces. About the lake is the breeding place of the ducks and they will remain until the frost send them Southward.

This relay station was formerly kept by an old frenchman by the name of Belland. He was what is called by the settlers a "Squaw Man"--having bought a squaw from some Indian and living with her as his wife.

This station is very isolated there being no settlements west of Fargo and for that reason it is very difficult to get anyone to live there. Also the emigrants going into Montana, and Idaho to the mining camps all followed this trail prior to the opening of the posts at Jamestown and Bismarck.

(Larrabee, Sept. 1877)

Two years go by, another son is born, but still Mary is the only woman homesteading in Foster County. It's a chatty letter that talks about the mail carrier, an old blue cow, the children's birthdays, her closing remark carrying the most emotional clout--"Have seen no white woman except the ones from the post in three years." No more words are needed. A simple statement, added almost as an afterthought, attains a power that a profuse outpouring might have lost--an example of an instance when less is more.

Dakota Terr'y June 1879

Dear Patty:--

Your letter received and was glad to get all the news from home.

There have been a few men who have come in here and stayed a few months but no one has brought their families or made any long stay and to the best of my belief I am the only white woman in Foster County.

A new baby arrived at our house on May 12th. We have named him Charles Edward Larrabee and as his birthday is the same day as Berkleys they can both be able to celebrate their birthdays together. We are quite sure that these babies are the first white babies born in Foster County. As there are no County organizations I have entered their births in our family bible.

I forgot to tell you that we received the mail three times a week. The name of our mail-carrier is Edward Loomis. He stops at our house over night and keeps his relay of horses there then in the morning goes on to Fort Totten returning at night when he goes to Jamestown.

Lake Belland is named after an old Frenchman who lived there at the time the County was surveyed. He was what is known as a "Squaw man" having purchased a squaw from an Indian which it was easy to do for a pony or something else.

There is a little lake north east of here which has had no name. An old blue cow of ours wandered up there and was lost for a few days; since then the lake is known as the Blue Cow Lake.

Have seen no white woman except the ones from the post in three years.

(Larrabee, June 1879)

Another two years pass and Mary marvels to Patty that five years could have passed so quickly. Settlers are beginning to appear, the railroad is rumored to be coming through, and Mary's feelings are ambivalent about her life on the prairie. Contemplating the possible necessity of leaving the area, she comments, "I scarcely know whether I am glad or sorry." Maria is more philosophical, more reflective in this letter, as disjointed thoughts are strung together by free association.

Dakota Terr'y 1881

Dear Patty:--

Time passes quickly even on the prairie and we have been here five years.

Two brothers named Smith, E. Dalefield and Herbert, have settled on the south side of the lake.

They carry on a trade with the Indians buying furs. This is the first settler near us but neither of the brothers are married.

The country looks beautiful--I wish you could see it. There is some talk of a R.R. coming through the county but it will not be within twenty miles of us.

The R.R. is the North Pacific and there is talk of surveyors working in that part of the county brought in by the freighters and mail carriers.

If such is the case we will not be here many years longer as we will not be so prosperous after the R.R. arrives. The travel then will leave the old trail and I scarsely know whether I am glad or sorry.

(Larrabee, 1881)

Mary starts out her next letter with good news: "At last we have a real, bona-fide settler." After a six-year wait, surely her excitement can't be contained at having a companion. Here again, however, she uses restraint in describing her feelings: "My, it seems so comfy to have some woman near even if she is a couple of miles away." Her choice of the word "comfy" is so right somehow. A homely derivation of comfort,[8] meaning a cheerful, reassuring closeness, there is no question but what she will derive comfort from her new neighbor. The word exudes a feeling of warmth, balm for the soul, a kindred spirit with whom to share the joys and sorrows of prairie living.

Dakota Terr'y 1882

Dear Patty:--

At last we have a real, bona-fide settler. He has taken a pre-emption on the South side of Lake Belland and is building him a "wee brown soddy." He is working for Mr. Larrabee and will move his family here. His name is George Bakken.

My, it seems so comfy to have some woman near

even if she is a couple of miles away. These people have some family and I am glad for the sake of our family for our children will have some other children to play with.

It was a real fact about the R.R. and it has come in as far as Jamestown. Another townsite is platted in this county and is called Carrington after Henry Carrington of Toledo, Ohio, of the Carrington Casey Land Company.

This will bring in the settlers and soon we will see a shack on every quarter section. You may wonder what a quarter section is. It is 160 acres of land 1/2 mile long and all the land here is surveyed in that way.

The mail now instead of coming from Jamestown comes via Carrington, and a P.O. has been established here with Mr. Larrabee as Postmaster.

Caroline H.

(Larrabee, 1882)

As indicated by her previous letter (1882), Mary senses change taking place. This is confirmed by her next letter. Settlers are pouring into Dakota Territory, and she nicely juxtaposes, in the first two paragraphs, the flurry of activity produced by this mass migration with the still vast emptiness of miles and miles of people-less prairie. Her last paragraph has a can-you-top-this flavor to it, suggesting a certain amount of pride at being able to survive in a

land where such extreme conditions exist. She chooses to illustrate the effect on the people caught in these circumstances rather than describing the conditions themselves.

April 1883

Dear Patty,

At last Foster County is coming into its own. The town of Carrington is booming. New settlers are coming in droves. Two passenger trains have reached Carrington and many who wished to come on the first train could not even find a foothold on the cars--men swarming over the tops of the cars and clinging to the railings on platforms.

Carrington has become the greatest boom town in the northwest. Still you can drive all day away from the railroads without seeing a sign of human habitation, bush nor tree, shack nor stack. There are no roads and we find our way across the prairie by reading the inscriptions showing range, township, and section placed on the surveyors' stakes.

As I have not written to you for so long I must give you a story of the blizzard which raged here this winter. It was one of the worst I have ever seen. The winter has been very cold and I scarcely see how the emigrants who landed in Carrington have existed, as there were no trains in there all winter. The snow was so great that the Northern

Pacific abandoned everything until spring. A number of boarding cars were left there which the people used as homes and a quantity of R.R. ties which were taken possession of and used as fuel. Some provisions had been left in the cars when they were abandoned and these, and the jackrabbits which they managed to kill, kept them alive through the winter. If it had not been for this I think that the few who stayed would have perished as no relief reached them until March '83 when the Northern Pacific train reached there.
(Larrabee, April 1883)

The final letter to Patty, written in 1884, describes a developing community, complete with social niceties. She also alludes to the speculators interested in promoting bonanza farming. Eight years had made vast differences in Dakota Territory. Where once a stay here had been equated with a jail sentence, now it was considered a marvelous place to stake a claim, enjoy an adventure, start a new life.

1884

Dear Patty,

William and I just came home from Carrington where we went on business and I called on some of the wives of the new settlers. So many people have come in. There is a beautiful new hotel named the Kirkwood which is run in great style,

> negro waiters and everything else accordingly. This has been done to accommodate the class of people who are buying land, as many rich people from the east are coming in to buy land. (Larrabee, 1884)

Glancing back over these fragments of one woman's life, a person is prompted to ask, "Why are these scraps so delightful?" A large measure of the success is, of course, a result of what she chooses to tell, but the most fascinating subject matter can be rendered dull and lifeless by an inept telling. We will see a wide variance in the appeal of different diaries and letters, all dealing with the pioneer experience, and this can be attributed to the writer's skill at choosing the detail, capturing the emotion and the moment, giving an accurate description of a person, place, or event. Mary's letters are interesting because she gives details that are definite, terms that are concrete ("The town of Carrington is booming. New settlers are coming in droves." "This will bring in the settlers and soon we will see a shack on every quarter section."). And she speaks of significant things in her life--a new baby, prairie flowers, the sight of a white woman's face. "Still you can drive all day away from the railroads without seeing a sign of human habitation, bush nor tree, shack nor stack."

Writing about those things which concern her, Mary continues, "As there are no County organizations I have entered their births [her two sons'] in our family bible."

A very simple sentence can reveal many things: the isolation of a place with no county organizations, the need people have to record their existence ("I was here; I passed this way"), and a certain religious undertone, the implication being that only so sacred a book as the family Bible is worthy of preserving such important information.

Mary's style is simple and sincere. There are no overblown phrases, no pretentious or coy wordings, and very few usages of metaphor. Her words are chosen from concrete experiences that plainly stated have a power they might otherwise lack. There is an occasional parenthetical, two examples of colloquial expressions--"wee brown soddy" (1882) and "squaw man" (1879), and some use of quoted conversation, all of which add interest and a sense of being there. But primarily it is her direct, matter-of-fact way of writing about everyday things that catches and holds the reader s attention.

Moving east from the Carrington area to a homestead north of Devils Lake we find a fifteen-year-old girl named May Bethia Roberts, as she lives within the pages of her diary, beginning with her arrival on May 17, 1884, and continuing through her first term at the University of North Dakota in December, 1889. May sometime later went back and filled in (along margins and between lines) what she considered pertinent additional information, including a directory of neighbors' names and catalogs of activities, along with an introductory page which states, "On reading

my diary and the following pages you will learn why we moved to North Dakota" (Jensen, n.p.).

Written in lovely script, May's first pages of entries are short and to the point, mainly a commentary on the weather, a litany of daily chores, and a record of the family's aches and pains. One can see the strong dependence on mail for news; much letter writing is done.

1884

May 17: Arrived at home Sat. at five o'clock. Weather fine.

May 18: Weather warm but windy. home all day--rote to Aunt Hallie.

May 19: Mike plowing. cold and windy. Papa sowed some & planted rasberry bushes strawberry's & pieplant.

May 20: Cold and windy. Papa building & Mike plowing.

May 21: Rainy and cold.

May 22: Raining and still cold.

May 23: Cleared away & quite warm. Papa planted beans & sowed oats. Mamma sick with cold.

May 24: Very warm. Papa sowed bush oats & Mike harrowed. Planted some fruit-corn--Ned laid up with sore shoulder. Wrote Cora D. Mamma washing and I clean up yard. moped.

May 25: Lovely day. Papa & Mamma went to church this morning. Took Ned in to lance his shoulder. rote to Bell & Aunt Emma

May 26: I went to town with Mr. Wilicon. Katy came over and we went over to the hills. weather warm. Mike & Papa dug in the well & found water.

May 27: Papa went to Turtle Mountain this morning. Mike broke. weather warm.

May 28: Awful windy. Mike & boys went to town in the evening. Mamma sewed on boys pants. gave Loyd music lesson.

May 29: Baby was sick last night--weather warm. Mamma went over to Willcons' this afternoon. Give Floyd music lesson.

May 30: Rainy today. Mamma been writing all day to Aunt Kate and Mrs. Shelly. The white cow had a little calf last night. sowed some lettus.

May 31: Churned today. Weather clear & windy. I went in to town at five o'clock. got a letter from Aunt Lilly, Kate & Nellie. Mamma set some hens eggs under the duck today. Mike broke all week. two weeks today since we came. sent letter. Allie, Kate, Guy, Jessie.

June 1: Went after bones started ten and came back about four all tired. rote to Nellie J. weather warm.

June 2: Boys started to school & Mamma went in with them. got slate pencils. boys do not like teacher. Mike broke. Mamma stopped at Mrs. Brainard & Kate over.

(Jensen, pp. 1-3)

May continues her daily recording of weather, work accomplished, comings and goings of the family. In September May returns to Delano, Minnesota, to continue her schooling, staying with Aunt Emma. Her diary entries dwindle to one-liners about the weather and stop altogether the first of October, not resuming until June 6, 1885, which entry is prefaced by the pledge, "I will now try and continue my diary and hope with better success than before. /s/ 'M.B. Roberts'" (Jensen, p. 21). There is a noticeable change in her style now; an awareness of sentence construction surfaces. May, not yet sixteen years old, is now a "school

marm" headed for her first teaching assignment near Churches Ferry.

1885

July 6: I left home this morning and Papa and I arrived at Mr. Wardropes at eight o'clock, and so was in plenty time to call school. It begins to look brighter now in the west and as we have had a heavy rain I hope it will clear off and not be so cold.

July 7: It has rained and blowed steady all day except at sundown it was calm. I wrote a letter to Stella and sent by Victor, we are having abundance of strawberries at present.

July 8: Sent for the mail but did not get any, it has cleared off and it has blowed enough clouds from the west to make a small earth. [She may mean the blowing stirred up enough dust to create a small earth.] I did not get up very early.

July 9: It has been cool all day and it clouded up some at noon, but there was a lovely sunset which signifies a fair day tomorrow.

July 10: It has been very warm today. this week of school has passed very smoothly. I picked enough strawberries for supper & ends one/mo [of teaching].

July 11: It was very warm this morning but heavy clouds came up in the afternoon and rained untill dark. no mail, while I wrote to the Supt. drove off cattle, worked & etc.

July 12: Today has been calm and lovely. We all went out to lake Ibsen about three miles to hunt but did not get anything but strawberries.

July 13: This morning not a cloud was to be seen and at noon I thought it would surely rain, but we have had a lovely sun set which signifys a good day tomorrow. I found my ear-ring today which I lost Sat. The roses are just lovely and the prairie is covered with them.

July 14: Warm and pleasant.. sent by Victor and got ink and postal cards.

July 15: It rain last night and is cool today. Wrote to Mama.. and got a spool of thread from Minnewaukan. Mr. Wardrope shot nine ducks and a prairie chicken with five [illegible].. one of the ducks had a bright blue bill which I never saw before.

July 16: Today is my sixthteenth birth of years." This day has been rainy and cold but clearing off and there is a fine sun-set.. "first of the year strong but last bright and clear .." if they day foretell of any thing.. and as it was two cold I did not go to the school house but heard them here. I will not have to work all year. My fortune of today was-- Love. Denlanoite; satin; beggar; horse; wheelbarrow; big house; horses; and name: = so goeth the 16th year. Last year I was at home in Devils Lake and healped all summer: then in in September I went to Delano: Christmas I went to Rockford.. and made future arrangements for 1889: then came home Mar. 14th and went to school and taught school in the spring untill now so endeth the 15 year.

July 17: This morning it was cool but in the afternoon it was quite warm. I thought of having school tomorrow but will not for W. has the tooth-ache.. the school has did fine but we haven't any blackboard and I do believe the board does not intend to get us one either, but I intend they shall.. I picked a dipper full of strawberries this evening.

July 18: Today has been very warm. I did scarcely any-thing..chrochet some as I finished my feather edge last evening.

July 19: This morning we had a little rain, and it was cloudy untill noon.. then it was boiling hot until dark. Mrs. W. and myself were visiting Mr. Cuterman & Mrs. she is a sleepy looking, he is better: they live in a little bit of a house on a big hill and have splendid water. then we went to Nelson's she is talktive person and desidely pretty they have the house fixed up very nice. I recieved five letters and the Eagle.. Millie is home now on her dignity.. but I guess her mother would not let her stay any longer. May Waren wrote a good letter and had a good time fourth I [illegible] letter I answered.. for she is getting left as usual..

Mama wrote & Mrs. Young. But I don't see why Cora don't write for she is so prompt. Mr. W. shaved his head today he is so afraid of being bald. My head ached yesterday and it seems ready to burst today--I will be obliged to get a new pen or stop.

July 20: I had an other letter from the Supt.. that Victor got this morning. the day has been cool & windy. the wild barly is awful and sticks in everything. sheep couldent live here 48 hours.

July 28: Well we are all alive after last night's hail and storm we were ready to go down cellar but thought it best not too. I wrote to Mama and will send it tomorrow. today is very hot and sultry "more rain."

July 29: Papa's birthday is today. I wish I were down home. but I can't be so that ends it. Victor brought a letter from C.D. at last. she is the same as ever going and having good times. Jennie Robinson has been to seen her. I wonder if she would know me or I her? General Grant is dead! Death has a key to all our castle's--!

(Jensen, pp. 21-26)

If one compares May Roberts' diary to Sarah Canfield's, some differences are readily apparent. The two young women were obviously writing with different purposes in mind. Sarah expected her musings to be read by others. Therefore, she maintained a distance between her reader and herself, restricting personal comments and emotional outbursts. Instead she took great pains to describe what she saw, almost as if she had a charge to gather this information and record it accurately and faithfully. It is safe to assume that if Sarah were writing out of experiences similar to May's, one would get a complete description of the homestead shack, the topography, what people were wearing, and a full account

of a typical school day, complete with lessons taught, books used, and the nature of the students.

But you would not get inside the person to the extent one does with May. May is writing primarily for herself. I doubt that it occurs to her that her daily chronicles will one day provide insights into life on a North Dakota prairie. As we will see further on, she protects herself from peeping eyes by using ciphers from time to time to conceal certain feelings. Most of the time, however, she just writes down what she's thinking, using homely expressions and a candor that's decidedly charming--"Rainy last night and blowed blue blazes" (Jensen, p. 4); "This morning it is cool and pleasant and shurly no one want a priettier place than the prairie when it is calm . . . tonight there was to be a dance at Mr. Hjousmans but it has gone up spout like everything. I feel awful mean today" (Jensen, p. 30); or "Mr. W. Mr. Leslie, Evaline, Victor and I went over to Mr. Hjousman's--I to see the new housekeeper--which I think is not a person I would like to associate with very much" (Jensen, p. 31). Not even the relatives are exempt from some bitter sarcasm: "We have given up looking for the last time for this summer for they didn't come yesterday nor today. They have all got the toothache backache or baby is cross or they will break up the farm if they should spend $7.50 poor! poor! poor! things!" (Jensen, pp. 33-34).

Only so auspicious an occasion as a sixteenth birthday calls forth elevated language, biblical in tone and struct-

ure: "so endeth the 15 year" and "so goeth the 16th year" (Jensen, p. 23). The death of a national figure brings out the poetic, philosophical side, whether borrowed or original: "Death has a key to all our castle's" (Jensen, p. 26). The fact that news of General Grant's death had reached the North Dakota prairie is noteworthy in itself. News traveled slowly in those days, and newspapers and magazines were few. Therefore, it was rare to have any mention made of external affairs. The prairie was a world unto itself and little in the way of famous people or national events penetrated its remoteness, its vastness.

For May it is the world of "boarding out" with the Wardropes while teaching school, and she has some opinions about that too. On August 5 she writes, "Mrs. W. wants the board money which she says is $26.28 and has charged even Papa, Ma, and All when they came up there on a visit and I don't think it is right" (Jensen, p. 28). Three days later: "At last I have the order [school order, or paycheck, in the amount of $30] and Mr. W. got it cashed 90¢ on the dollar.. but he took it as 30 dollars on board.. the 2 mo. was 25.28 and then 4.72 on the 3 mo, and that will leave 8.13 to pay at last" (Jensen, p. 29). The Wardropes and May keep a very close accounting of their financial affairs, right down to the penny: ". . . I payed Mrs. W. 8¢ that I owed her and Mr. W. owed me 5¢ so I gave her 3¢" (Jensen, p. 30). With the school year [3 months] drawing to a close, May anticipates problems: "I don't know but, it seem as though

I was going to have trouble about ending my school for it seem as though anyone could see that I have taught three months. I am going up to Mr. Nelsons & Ingbritsons and see what they say.. for of course Wardropes would like the board bill run up higher than the sky" (Jensen, p. 35). The final day of school arrives, May receives a warrant in the amount of fifty-nine dollars plus ten dollars in cash, and her mother comes to "settle up" with the Wardropes. May gets in a parting shot about her boarding family: "Mama came up after me with Kenny [May's pony]. She had quite a time setteling with Mr. W. and I think they would as soon skin a flea for his hide as not if they thought they were going to cheat someone and get $.0001000" (Jensen, p. 37).

May enjoys a two-week break before starting back to school, this time as a student once again. (Devils Lake had built a two-story schoolhouse and there were teachers with the "necessary qualifications" to teach May.) She spends the time doing housework, going visiting with her mother, and taking a weekly music lesson.

Once school begins May is involved in speech and debate, teaching Sunday School, playing the organ, and rehearsing for the school play, The Last Loaf. The night of the performance May's tone is euphoric: "O! tonight the play is over with and is a success.. how I like the excitement!" (Jensen, p. 45). School, on the other hand, "is getting to be regular machine work" (Jensen, p. 49), states May in her May 31 journal entry.

About this time one notices May getting very much caught up in the social whirl. She is a young girl who, like most young girls, enjoys the company of young men, parties, dancing, and a general good time. A year earlier her journal had contained a rather painful admission: "Mr. Hausman was over for a few moments yesterday evening, and O, dear! I must say I never acted worst to anyone and I don't know why either for I never ment to but I must try to act more lady like for as Mama say I am not very much" (Jensen, pp. 32-33). Whether May blossomed over the next few months or whether that was just a mother's rather harsh appraisal, there is no question but what she is kept busy with social invitations and activities. One young man figures prominently in her remarks and accounts for the bulk of her ciphering--Mr. Carl Galiger. May met him at the roller rink in Devils Lake on a Saturday night in April, 1886, and over the next few months, his name, spelled a variety of ways, appears with increasing frequency, providing insights into the ways of courtship in another time:

1886

July 18: Mr. Gallagher came and we went horseback riding.

July 24: Mr. C. Galiger came out and spent the evening.

July 26: In the evening Messrs. Ball and Galiger were out.

July 29: G. was out.

August 1: Mr. Galiger came out and spent the evening.

(Jensen, pp. 55-56)

This does not mean she confines herself to one man's attentions. On occasion she goes horseback riding with Mr. Green--or Mr. Kriffer. Or spends time with Mr. Jenks though she finds him "not a very pleasing young gentleman" (Jensen, p. 63).

Mr. Galiger clearly comes out the leading contender, however. As with all romances, May's diary entries reveal the fun, fickleness, and frustration of boy-girl relationships. She wants him one day; the next day she doesn't. [Ciphering decoded in brackets.]

1886

October 29: Today was Society day (ladies church group) all was clear along the Pontamac. Mr. Galiger brought out three new songs--all of which are very pretty. his grapes reminds of of "Sour Grapes."

October 31: Today was just lovely. Mama was to church and I all ready for S.S. but the boys would not get the horse untill it was to late. Mr. N. came up and the family departed at 2 o'clock. Mr. Galiger came out horseback--we went for a walk--sang--and he staid for tea, untill seven o'clock. I was glad when he was gone.

November 5: Weather cool, but clear. In the evening Mr. Galiger called, said he could and "would not come soon again,"--we finished our examination today. I was editoress for the Society.

(Jensen, pp. 64-65)

Mr. Galiger's resolve lasts six days.

November 11: Lovely day and evening. Mr. Galigher came out & brought his horn and staid untill eleven o'clock. I could not play very well, but am going practice for next time.

November 13: I had a fearful headache and had to go to bed in the afternoon. I thought my head would burst.

November 14: Today has been very pleasant but a little cold. In the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Speisman came over O dear I am so lonesome [I wish Carl would come, I do, Carl.] I have tried and practiced all I could.

November 18: Very pleasant and calm out today. Mr. Galligher came and spent the evening.

November 20: I and Mr. G-- went to the skating rink--the crowd was slim, but I had quite a nice time as it was my first skating of the season. [It is 7 months since we met. How short that seems.] we came home 10 min to eleven. I was very tired and sleepy too.

November 21: Today was appeared cold & sullen, & Marie's wedding day. Mama & I went to the M.E. church and saw crowds going up to the Catholic church. I was invited to go--but if I wasn't good enough to invite to there reception & etc. I felt too good to go and see them married--but for all of that I would like to have seen them, but others would have enjoyed it to well. In the evening about seven o'clock Mr. Galiger drove out for his music and one of my music books, he stayed but a few moments [I asked forgiveness, he said there was nisuch, an engagement.]

November 25: Today is Thanksgiven Day. --I made a nice dinner as I could for all, and the boys with Papa spent the afternoon in town, in the evening as I was puting my butter away Mr. Galiger called for me to attend the Ball, held at the Rink. -- well I went--I think it was bout 9.20 when we started 12 m. when we started home. [I sent Carle away. O! Carle. come back.] I enjoyed myself, having a quiet pleasant time. Mr. G--seems very distant with me.

November 28: I have been so very lonesome all day. I do wish something would break the monotony, Did not leave the house all day.

December 2: Somewhat warmer than yesterday--as it was 25 below. -[Saw Carle. Seems pleasant]-at noon. I ran up to Mrs. Jenks a few minutes.

December 9: Clear. The society was some what of a fizzle ran over to Mrs. J a few moments--finish the work on my hat band. Mrs. Sperman was here in the afternoon--then about 7--Mr. Faselt & Bertha came to spend the evening & about 8--Mrs. S. Dervis & Mr. Galiger--we had corn & apples for refreshments. sang some & played euchre. untill nearly 12 P.M. [I could not speak to Carle alone. I hope he has forgiven me.]

December 24: At noon I went up to Mrs. Campbells & practiced my piece, for tonight and Mama made my dress--pink basque--lace sleeves & skirt with lace drapery. I got along all right at the church, then changed at Mrs. Goodhue's, and enjoyed myself at the ball-went to Mr. Christensons for supper.--Mr. G--suit was lovely. came home about 3 o'clock.--he is going away on Sun.'s train [Oh, Carle. I am sorry.]

1887

January 2: Clear and moderate Mama & boys went to S.S. I stayed at home--got dinner & wrote to Ima Mattie & Millie--just at 1/2 past 8 o'clock Mr. Galiger drove out..as I was undressing for bed--his refreshments of oranges-grapes & nuts were very acceptable & were a kind N.Y.'s gift of friendship [O, Carle. Only come back]

(Jensen, pp. 64-76)

May and Mr. Galiger continue to go out periodically when he is in the area, but May also goes out with others, principally a Mr. Christensen. Mr. C. is definitely playing second fiddle to Mr. G. that spring. "Started to go to Church..when Mr. C. drove up so did not go--went for a short ride..on horseback..he spent the aft. [O Carle, why don't you come.] did nothing all day, splendid weather" (Jensen, p. 101).

On May 23, 1887, May begins teaching once again. This time she will not have to "board out" but rather can live at home, riding horseback to her school at Sweetwater.

1887

May 23: Showery and not so very warm--I started for my school at 7:30 .AM. arrived there 15" to 9--had seven scholars.. only one speaks perfect English-- hope I shall prosper.. for the school house is new and being on a arm of Sweetwater has a pleasant location.

June 22: At the school house at 9.15.. and found the door locked-- I had just started for Mr. Lohnes when I met him--coming with key-- he gave me my order--and after school I went up to Mr. Cozkendall's and got it cashed.. $30--payed my board bill of $10 to mama.. went in town & spent $5.25 & loan Mama $1.25 and bought her a cameo breast pin- and myself pair of earrings.

(Jensen, pp. 104, 109)

In August of 1887, May and her friend Marie, decide to take an excursion to Minot to visit a Miss Webber.

1887

August 13: At four o'clock Mrs. Walker, Mama & I all went into town I then went to the depot where Marie was waiting..we took our seats I had hand satchel & carpet bag & she a large valice-- we waited about 30 min. before the train started.. we soon reached Churches Ferry..where we met C. Kempt and passed the town of York which was just a few buildings.. then Rugby Junction the train stoped for tea.. we walked around the depot.. saw some of the worst looking Indians.. and some of the boys were very skillful with the bow & arrow.. after passing the Junction it began growing dark. & we soon were wishing our selves in Minot.. we made the acquaintance of the operator at Granvill.. & arrived at Minot 10:15 P.M. met Mr. P. Kelly for the first

time.. he then took us up to the Parker House.. and said he would call for us at 8 o'c.. to go to breakfast.. we then steped in to the parlor and interviewed Lottie & Mr. Morris.. who was looking fatter & redder than ever.. & in a few minutes sought our room No 5 we were very nervous & it was very noisy & Marie droped a sleep but I did not untill three.. we then woke up at five.

August 14: Well we spent the morning fighting bed bugs.. and were dressed and waiting in the parlor 5 min. to 8.. & at 8 prompt Mr. Kelly came for us.. we occupied the head of the table.. Marie on the right and I on the left--after breakfast.. we sat out on the veranda for some time & then went to our room, changed our dresses and started to find Miss Webber.. found her sick in bed and looking quite bad.. we staid, and talked untill nearly 12..then went back.. and again went to dinner.. and were going for a ride when a severe rain storm came up.. after that I ran over and saw Miss Webber for about three hours.. then went back to the hotel & wanted Marie to go with me down street & get some fruit for Miss W. but she would not & I went with her to Mr. Flennerfelts & we all went on the blufs south of town.. then back and to supper.. Mr. McMannes & Marie--Mr. Kelly & I.. then I changed my dress & Messrs. Mc & K. went and procured a double carriage & we drove out four miles farther west and saw the "big ganswell" bridge.. the largest or one of the largest trussel bridges known. Mr. Mc & I walked across it 1600 ft. long, 110 ft. high.. while the other two waited below.. we arrived home at dark.. I then beg the company of Clarence to take me over to Miss Webbers & then bade her "good-bye." came home & found we were given no 2 to sleep in.

(Jensen, pp. 117, 119-120)

May's return trip is uneventful and she goes back to her school-teaching. She goes to the Grand Forks Fair with Mr. Christenson and her bread takes first place at the fair in Devils Lake. It's a busy fall.

Christmas comes and is observed quietly.

1887

December 24: "Christmas eve.." --We all got ready to go to Mrs. Van Dusin's to have a neighborhood Christmas gathering--but all got in the sled & started & Papa said it was to stormy so came back.. --I made a necktie for Mrs. Nasseth & Grandma--in the evening all went into the Christmas tree. I spoke "Christmas Party" by Will Carleton.. & helped them sing & played one piece.

December 25: "Merry Christmas"--for a present Mama gave me a pretty plain gold ring.. the day windy but not very cold about 3 in. of snow. Papa and Mama went to church & then going to Mr. Jenks where they were invited to dinner.-- after church Clyde came after me so I went, spend the aft. & went to church with Archie in the evening & then all came home together.. collar cuffs & handkerchief from Mrs. Walker.

(Jensen, p. 144)

A winter storm gets incidental coverage, in spite of its intensity and the lives lost: "Severest storm of season--and in fact the worst for years..--100's frozen to death" (Jensen, p. 147). She plans a party to celebrate her parents' twentieth wedding anniversary in March. On April 16, she writes, "letter from Mr. Galliger," the first mention she has made of him in some time (Jensen, p. 159). In May she is teaching school once again, this time with sixteen scholars (Jensen, p. 163). Her eighteenth birthday is barely mentioned, quite a contrast from the one two years ago: "My birthday--showery.. had a long letter from Mr. Galliger for a birthday greeting" (Jensen, p. 173).

The thought may occur that, for a schoolteacher, May's

grammar, her lax punctuation, her irregular spellings are surprising, if not to be criticized. One should not lose sight of her age, and the fact that requirements for teaching school were those of an earlier time and a frontier community. Teaching had to be done, and by any who could teach. One couldn't wait for a sufficient population of advanced degrees. In addition, May was not writing with an eye to impressing an audience with her finely constructed sentences. She was keeping a record for herself of thoughts and feelings. The thought itself was more important, as it tumbled out onto the page. The fact she so religiously wrote on a daily basis suggests she must often have written when tired, when the lamplight was poor, when she wasn't in the mood. This idea gains support when one reads from the original script. Sometimes the writing becomes a scrawl across the page, sometimes it is pinched and crowded together, and sometimes it looks like a page from a penmanship book, neat and carefully constructed. Diaries, letters, and journals enjoy license where composition is concerned. Their homely expressions increase the charm and retain the spontaneity of the correspondent, the personality of the writer.

In October, 1888, May has enough money saved to go to the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks, which she does for one term. Mr. Galliger happens to be on the same train and he invites her to dinner. May reaches the University that afternoon and, while initially apprehensive

about what awaits her, she is adj ting nicely by the next day.

1888

October 21: . . . wrote letters in the afternoon.. Im not homesick.. think I shall like it here ever so much.

October 22: Took my examination today shall go in the 2 yr. prep.

October 27: Went down to the depot with Will--came right back..--school is progressing nicely..--am in my classes & find they keep my busy.

October 28: Went down street and got my books walked one way and am very tired.

October 29: Went to Congergational Church.. found they have a lovely building & very nice. - was almost sick all at ..--the walk is almost to long.. -in the evening went down in the parlour where they sing for half an hour.

November 4: The week as passed.. and so quickly. I have got my studies. and like them.. this morning was to tired for church & was working some example when Mrs. Sprague came and said Mr. Ruhberg was in the parlour.. I went down and visited him & he invited me to a change for our usual Sunday dinner--by going to dinner with him. - And after to go riding with Mr. G. and friends--I asked to go & we met the Miss Nugents and liked them very much and enjoyed my ride ever so much. Came back at 4 o'c, --Miss Allen called me to her room that evening and repremanded me..-thus did my trouble begin.]Explanatory note supplied by May at later date: Seems like while out riding there 5 in the buggy--we crossed over into East Grand Forks--and that was an awful place--even to ride thru. we went over one bridge, up a couple blocks then back to G.F. on another bridge.]

November 5: Had an interview with the Pres. this morning and all thru in evening.. I wrote to Mama & think that perhaps I am learning a lesson.. but twas hard to keep still before them--and to know that before my concience & Creater

that I am right yet to admit the superiority of another.

November 17: A long week--received a nice letter from Papa. -Mr. Ruhberg called & had a talk with Pres. & I saw him a few moments..--!

November 18: Went to M.E. church with Miss Rusell - I have changed my room as a new girl came . . .

November 25: Home all day. In the evening was down in parlor to sing.. --on Friday night we now have skating on the little coulee by the building. --no snow yet.

November 29: "Thanksgiven"--in forenoon I cleaned and mended. got ready for dinner & was waiting for mail to bring my excuse to go down to Miss Nugents and it did not come--so for fun I wrote one & thought if I could write one as some one said I might go--it would be a good joke--& so did; but he suspected & it didn't work so when my permit did come he [the President] wouldn't let me go so I staid at home all day and such a weary time. in the evening went to the parlour where we all enjoyed ourselves.

November 30: Went down town and bought me a pair of skates --saw Miss Nugents for a few moments--missed my dinner & skated quite a bit in the aft.. --and didn't find it very hard work..--Three wks. to Christmas.

December 1: Home all day--have been quite busy & so nervous & worried--had a note from Will saying he came through G.F. wish I might see him. but do not dare to.

December 3: In chapel we were forbiden this morning to go on the ice after 5 o'c or to skate with any gentleman..-and in the evening we were instructed by the Pres. not to walk, talk, or meet any gentleman-except our brother.. one girl was suspended for the time for skating against the rules.

(Jensen, pp. 195-199)

We are getting far afield from the prairie experience per se when we look at May's record of her University ex-

perience. The number of women who left the homestead during those years to obtain a college education was small, there being 37 girls in a class of 75 for the year 1886-87 (Geiger, p. 55). The experience is interesting, however, inasmuch as it reveals the social mores of the time as well as the double standard imposed on women. May has come across as a feisty, fun-loving young girl in the four years we have followed her activities. The strictures placed upon her in this academic setting do rankle her as her humor goes unappreciated, her jokes are frowned upon, and rules are imposed upon her. It's not surprising she lasts but one term. Two years later (1895) she is married to George Ruhberg, the gentleman who took her on that forbidden ride across the river.

Another decade goes by and we shift back to the Southwest quarter of Section 10, Township 151, Range 76, near St. Charles, North Dakota. Mrs. Carl Olstad (nee R. D. Kately) came to North Dakota in 1900 with her brother, Erwin Kately, and built a sod house about 10' x 12' which was used as a schoolroom for a number of years. R. D.'s diary (her given name is never mentioned), typed from the manuscript by Historical Data Project personnel, begins June 24, 1899, at Utica, Minnesota, and ends March 20, 1903, in Anamoose, North Dakota. The entries are brief, sometimes only a word or two, and the time sequence irregular. There may be several days in a row with an entry and then nothing for days, even months.

On the 6th of April, 1900, Erwin (R. D.'s brother) left for North Dakota from Utica (Olstad, p. 1). On the 13th, R. D. receives a letter from her brother, urging her to join him:

1900

April 13: I received a letter from Erwin today and he is at Anamoose, S.D. [sic] He wants me to come. Mr. J. Tye was here today but did not bring my picture.

April 15: I went to Charley's yesterday after Erwin's clothes. To Mr. Tye's after our pictures. To Otis and stayed all night, to Frank's today. Paid Harry $2.70 for music lessons. Tye 30 for pictures. Rec'd 2.00 of Mrs. Allen for work. Will start for N.D. tomorrow if all is well. Joe Hesselschwert from were here today & Mr. & Mrs. Thos. Sidway.

April 16: Utica, St. Charles everett House, Eyota, C. P. Russel & son, Chester, Rochester, Broadway House, Breweries marsh west of city, Byron has been fires, Kasson, commercial House, T. J. Carpenter & Co. lumber saw Chraman. Stopped at Dodge Centre at 4:30 P.M. till 6:30. met T. H. Williams, 772-6th Ave. So. Minneapolis at Dodge Centre. Left Utica about 3 o'clock. Will reach St. Paul 8:30. Frank came over to Mr. Allen's last evening and brought me Erwin's clothes. It is 1330 from Utica to Anamoose.

April 17: Minneapolis, We reached this city about 9 o'clock last evening I stayed at "The Golden West Hotel" all night cost $1.00. It is still very dark and rainy 6:30. Took an electric car up from the depot. Saw the Union Depot and was--Republic Elevator Co.
8 tenant houses alive paint & all
K. Western Bd. Co.

April 18: Well here I am at Anamoose. Arrived here about midnight. There is a Dak. wind this morning. Everything is dry & dusty here. I saw the first "alkali surface" yesterday it began in the "Red River Valley" and extends westward yesterday (17) Mr. Williams gave me a box of fruit & a book entitled

"Beyond the City." The day before he gave me "The Pirates."

April 20: I went up to stay all night with Ida last night. Rec'd examination questions today from Vida Herred, Casselman. I commenced work today noon. Ida came this evening.

April 22: Annamoose-5:20 P.M.--It is very dry & windy today. I had a letter from Mrs. Allen Yesterday. Erwin has been helping a family to move out on their claim today. Mr. Arthur Billings brought Ida's trunk in today.

April 29: Well the wind blows today as usual. Mrs. Sykes went to Lonona the 27. Miss Betterfield has been staying here several days. Erwin took a gentleman out to "locate" yesterday. It was the first time he had tried to drive them on the road. I had letters from Fred Walter, Emma & Walter this week. I write to Supt. yesterday. It rained a little Friday night. I wrote to Stella. Fred, Walter and Emma today and am going to write to Otis today.

May 9: Came to the claim at 9 P.M. yesterday. Went up to Erwins in the afternoon. Went to Mrs. Johnson's after the milk & flour.

(Olstad, p. 2)

From this brief sampling, one can see R. D. is interested in keeping more of a log of events than a chronicle of her thoughts and feelings. She is interested in maintaining a running account of the weather; nearly every entry refers to it in one way or another. She records arrival and departure times and the cost of a hotel room. She keeps track of the letters she writes and to whom, as well as the callers she has. She records purchases and what she paid for them: "Noon--Cathay--small village. whip .15--appricots .25--bread .10--crackers .05--letters .10--Will .50--Erwin .15 Total 65¢" (Olstad, p. 4). Her sentences

when they are sentences, are short and choppy and jump from one subject to another.

As a result, R. D.'s diary is not quite as interesting nor as revealing as May's. Still, her comments--even on a subject as mundane as the weather--are phrased somewhat humorously and in her own vernacular.

1901

May 8: (evening) It has been trying to rain all day but has made a dismal failure of it . . .

May 9: (afternoon) Quite a fine shower. Mosquitoes thick.

May 16: Yesterday was hotter than Dutch love . . .

June 12: Windy as _ _ _ . . .

October 16: Snowed a trifle this morning. Eight pupils. If it is "fine" Inez and I will go over to Mr. Marsh's after school this evening.

October 23: . . . We are having "Indian Summer"

1903

March 1: Been thawing all day. John Slag buried their baby today.

(Olstad, pp. 5-6, 8, 14)

The last entry above illustrates again the pioneer woman's acceptance of tragic circumstances. The weather--and a baby's burial--are expressed matter-of-factly and unemotionally.

R. D. is teaching school though we learn only about the state of attendance, along with the daily weather report, in most instances:

1901

April 29: School began today, enrolled 9.

May 1: five pupils. Mr. Keohler was here this forenoon to see about closing school. Minnei was absent today.

May 9: Windy. We all went & picked flowers at noon. 5 pupils.

May 13: Minnie K. back to school once more. A fine day. Miss W. was here.

September 15: School began. six pupils. Cold & rainy.

September 17: No stove, no school. Some snow.

September 24: Rainy--Minnie only.

1903

January 5: School today. Whiped Fred Wirsh.

(Olstad, pp. 4-5, 7, 14)

When not engaged in teaching, R. D. was busy homesteading.

1900

June 12: Well today we will begin to build a house on my farm . . .

August 25: Well I have my scrubbing finished once more . . .

August 27: Washing is done.

1901

May 26: No wind. Erwin & Josie were over in the afternoon. Helped to move my stove. Misses Metcalf and Mr. Bok called in the evening. After dark I went to Mr. Conrads and helped E. & J. start the horses home.

May 28: 10 pupils. Jeanie & I went to Erwins "shack" and brought home our aprons full of wood.

August 18: . . . Stacked hay this forenoon.

August 20: Was to the P.O. today. Erwin is away. Rainy today. 14 loads of hay up.

September 20: Put on some tar paper last night. Willie Elsie & Minnie. It is quite warm today. One week of school is over and gone.

October 13: I washed, ironed, baked and washed and scrubbed the floor.

October 23: Was over to Miss Wilsons last evening filled my tick went to Mr. Reddings and got warrant for first month of school, went home and made fire guards till above eleven o'clock . . .

November 19: Finished [threshing] on Ready's last night. over 80 bushels. I went and helped Mrs. Larson last night. Eight threshers and Mr. Spear and Angle were there for supper.

1902

April 15: Sold a ton of hay to Mr. Gifford yesterday. This is a fine day. Went over to Archies and borrowed his saw and sawed ties and cleaned well today.

May 21: The wind blew the roof off my sod shanty this morning. Worked in my garden last night.

(Olstad, pp. 3, 5-11)

K. O. was obviously a person of versatile abilities and unflagging energies. She could build a house, paper a shack, clean as well, stack hay, and teach school. That couldn't have left much time for reflecting, though one moment of pensiveness is recorded about three months after her arrival. "Rainy. Alone, all alone" (Olstad, p. 6).

The good times get recorded in similar fashion, two or three words, with little or no detail:

1901

May 31: . . . Great Ball Game, speeches, and Bowery Dance yesterday.

November 9: Josie came over and she and I went to Anamoose. Mrs. Larson brought me home then

I went home with her and stayed all night. Sunday I came home.

1902

March 31: Cold and stormy. Waldorf Hotel. Helga and I went to church last night, and heard Mr. Mack preach his text was: eat drink and be merry.

June 4: We all went to Brush lake for a school picnic.

(Olstad, pp. 6, 9-10, 12)

It admittedly is not much to go on. R. D. was a woman of few words, yet there is a poignancy in places, such as when she lists those dead from an outbreak of typhoid. It resembles her earlier grocery lists--"Carley's baby's dead. Previous to October 7. Also Albert Kesler died Oct. 3 of typhoid fever. Ray died Sept. 5. Edd Harding, Sept. 1 or 3" (Olstad, p. 8). A few months earlier one brief comment about family sickness--"was over to see Erwin tonight but his house floats a red flag [sign of quarantine]"--is all we are told about the disease epidemics that wiped out whole families and left wives without husbands, husbands without wives, parents childless.

R. D.'s purpose in keeping a diary has more to do with keeping records than recording thoughts. She can look back and say, "Ah, yes, we were haying this time last year" or "I had five pupils in 1901." For us it is an abbreviated recap of more detailed experiences we have read that were written by other women. Bad weather, hard work, good times, school days--it's all there--a composite of the pioneer

woman's experience as provided by R. D. Kately Olstad.

At about this same time (1903-04) a young girl of 21 named Louisa Wanner was working out as a hotel chambermaid in Tintah, Minnesota, prior to her marriage to Will with whom she later homesteaded in northwestern North Dakota. Louisa is not wordy either, but she does elaborate a little more than R. D. Her vocabulary is limited, the grammar often incorrect. Yet Louisa paints a vivid word picture of what it was like to be "working out" in the early 1900's.

1903

December 23: This was the day before Christmas eve. And not a soul was here today. In the evening Susie & I went up town for some Christmas presents for Fred and Lizzie. Afterwards we wrote letters. I done the chamber work this morning and in the afternoon I scrubbed and ironed till supper time. This morning the first thing when I came down stairs the cleark took me and threw me outdoors for getting up a little too late.

December 24: This is Christmas eve and I am in Tintah, and the greenest people I ever saw in my life was in church. The Sunday school had a nice program. I got a present at the Christmas tree, a black skirt. I was homesick or rather lonesome for Willie. I did not want [illegible] but they coaxed me along [illegible] a lot of candy and nuts [page torn].

December 26: Saturday after Christmas I done my chamber, scrubbed, & ironed, all in the afternoon after supper I got my pictures and [illegible] them to hang so it would like more like home. I clean out my trunk which was [illegible] necessa[illegible] And I was over to Dr. Muckoll's after the milk.

December 27: This is the last Sunday in this year. I was washing nearly all day long. In the evening I was to church. I also was over to Dr. Muckolls again after the milk. I wrote four letters today to. Carried water for washing.

I got a hard knock on my left hand today from the dining room door. And a headache I had again the whole day. My cough came back [illegible] again but not as bad as it was.

December 28: [page torn]

December 29: Tuesday my ironing day and a lot to Iron I had. It was a cold day to but I kept warm with a hot iron in front of me and the hot stove back of me. We had a large crowd for supper tonight, and Leo had to wipe the dishes for me, he got mad at me because I did not want to do it alone. Today I got a letter from Em. I must go to bed now for I am so tired and my feet ache all over pretty near.

December 30: I finished my ironing and it took me all day but I had to help with all kinds of work. I got four letters today and a Xmas present yet from Bertey. I didn't even have time to comb my hair today, busy all day long. I baked bread while I was ironing today.

December 31: This is the last day this year, and the last washing I done for this year. I was up town this evening and sewed on bottons, fixed my under shirt so I'd have all done when the new year starts. This is the latest I ever went to bed since I am in Tintah. Its after eleven. I always go to bed early so I would not be so lonesome. I wrote a letter to Will this evening.

(Wanner, pp. 3-4)

Louisa is writing of herself and for herself. Her writing is peppered with "I," "me," "my," and centered around her daily existence, the concrete activities to which she devotes most of her days--chamber work, scrubbing, washing, ironing, doing the dishes, baking bread. The days go by, one pretty much like the other, with an occasional walk over to "Dr. Mickoll's after the milk" (Wanner, p. 4). Not surprisingly her feet ache, she's tired and suffers from headache. Yet she finds the energy to write letters, some-

times four a day, though we are never privy to what she writes about.

Writing letters, however, and receiving them are an important part of her existence. She is young and in love, and letters from Will are the high point in her day. The seriousness of the activity is evident when she writes, "I wrote a letter to Will tonight. Leo [another member of the hired help] would not let me alone while I was writing as I went out in the kitchen and then he always came and teased me, till I cried so mad I was at him. I wouldn't care if I wasn't writing" (Wanner, p. 8). Ten days later Louisa gets even: "This evening Leo was setting on the kitchen table so I rubbed my dirty dish rag in his face just because he was acting so smart. He got so mad at me that he didn't speak to me no more" (Wanner, p. 11).

Louisa's more complaining than her counterparts have been--"I am awfully tired and sleepy" (Wanner, p. 8), "I got a dreadful headache tonight" (Wanner, p. 9), "Today I carried water for washing tomorrow and ironed my Monday's washing. I got a sore face all over my face now its smarts just awful" (Wanner, p. 10), "I got chillblains so bad I couldn't have on my shoes this evening" (Wanner, p. 13).

She starts waiting on tables in February but that has its drawbacks too: ". . . I don't like that work for there are too many strange men around and I don't like to speak to them" (Wanner, p. 17). The end of the month she goes home for a few days, Will visits, and she goes to the Saat-

hoff's on another "working-out" assignment, followed by a hitch at the Johnsons. Braver than her contemporaries, Louisa writes, "Will & I slept in the same room last night & towards morning W. came to bed with me" (Wanne , p. 22). The rest is left to one's imagination.

Louisa, like R. D. and May and Marie, and even to some extent Sarah, writes about her world and the things of it. There are no great forays into "the meaning of life," no flights of fancy, no profound truths imported. These prairie women have their feet firmly planted on the wind-swept plains of their times and they write from that perspective, with a simple gaze, an unassuming manner, about what they see (and sometimes what they feel), an accounting of their days. As were their lives, so were their writings--spare, plain, and practical. There was little time for introspection, what with chores to do, clothes to mend, meals to make, fires to fight, crops to plan, children to raise. Brief moments of respite and reflection may have occurred in the sod hut doorway as they surveyed the prairie ablaze with wild flowers, but it was but a momentary rest from the work before them.

Gladys Pfaff kept a record of "daily events," as she called it, much like R. D. Kately. Beginning March 1, 1906, and continuing through December 31, 1907, Gladys crams two years of living between the covers of a tiny 3" x 5" Sterling notebook, a few of the unnumbered pages ripped out at random. She used a pencil for the most part and her entries were no

more than two or three words in some instances and seldom more than two or three short lines.

1906

March 1: Lou rented land from Dick Martin. I sewed.

March 2: I sewed all day. Lou went to town.

March 3: Lou went to town to have contract made for Martin land.

March 4: I had the headache. The children went to S.S. Sach's girls were here. The Myers stopped in on their way to town. John was over in the evening.

March 5: Lou helped Mr. Gribben butcher hog. Worked for Fletchers on the ice. Jessie has a cold. We & Loeny's drove to Fisher's to spend the evening.

March 6: I washed. Louis worked over to Fletcher.

March 7: Lou worked over to Fletcher's until noon.

March 8: I sewed coat for Martha. Lou whitewashed kitchen.

March 9: I finished Martha's coat.

March 10: We invited Sachs over.

March 11: Sach's were here for supper.

March 12: Rec'd letter from Clara.

March 13: We washed & scrubbed.

March 14: Made preparations to go to Clara's wedding. I worked button holes in Martha's coat. We left here at 2 o'clock. Sach's took care of our cow and chickens.

March 15: Clara's wedding day.

March 16: We were at Mama's all day.

March 17: We left for home 1:30 p.m. got home 4:30. Mrs. Sach's gave us a hot lunch.

(Pfaff, n.p.)

One day pretty much follows another, with certain tasks to be done, multiple errands to be run, daily chores to be completed. To read Gladys' journal in one sitting is almost numbing. One loses track of the days, unless church is mentioned; one loses track of the seasons, unless there is talk of snow, or an early frost, or spring thaw. Baby gets sick, Mama has a headache, the Joneses stop in for a visit, and the ironing gets finished. Gladys is not attempting to give expression to her thoughts and feelings, hers is more of a ledger accounting of the days, something to be referred to when you can't recall when it last rained or when John Doe's cow wandered away. It is a composite of who did what when, but not why, or if it mattered, or if it should. It does reveal some things about one woman's life, however--a life as recorded by one woman who had many headaches, many children, and many responsibilities. (Could the three be related?)

One of Gladys' neighbors, though she probably didn't know her, was Bess Cobb, who lived near the Cannonball River and wrote a letter dated July 31, 1907, to her friend Helen Munson back in Viroqua, Wisconsin. Though less than two pages long on the typed manuscript housed in Bismarck, the letter is brimming with anecdotes about living on the prairie. Her humor is infectious and she pokes good-natured fun at herself, at the terrain, and even some of the people who have settled nearby. If one had only Bess' letter to learn of life on the prairie, it would seem a gay and care-

free life indeed.

Dear Helen:

Suppose you girls are saying "Poor Bess" and feeling dreadfully sorry for me out here in the wild and wooly uncivilized regions of America. But really time just seems to fl I haven't done half I had planned and I am afra winter will be here before we are ready for it. I've sewed some, done a little fancy work and lots of darning and mending but most of my time has been spent out of doors digging in the garden and riding.

I look just like the Russian inhabitants for I am as black as a squaw. The sun out here fiarly bakes one and it is such bother to always run for sunbonnet and "kid" gloves. I declare I dont believe any Viroqua people would care to recognize me for I do show there is no shade about here.

Oh! but I do dress in style. other brought out all the old duds from he attic and this is a grand place to save your clothes and wear out old timers. You can see steam miles away--up one valley we can see ten iles, up to the Cannon Ball river--so when someone starts to our shack, if we see them in time we can comb our hair, change our gowns and get good meal in running order before they arrive. You see Dakota has some

redeeming qualities.

Wish you could come out, but I suppose you think I am too far away. I have the neatest little shack I've seen and "my crops" are tip top. I know you would enjoy our camp life for a short time.

I have a new bronco. He is white and has two brands (V.H. and S.P.) on him. He was surely a bucking bronco when we got him but now he is real dignified, except at times, then he lays back his ears, flips his head on one side, and you have to dig in your heels and knees and hold on for dear life. However I think he will become civilized in due time by merely associating with me--ha! ha! Riding horseback in Viroqua isn't in it at all. Here you dont have to be bothered with fences and roads but just go any old way you wish. Twelve miles when you mail or get a letter isn't any ride at all. I rode 20 mi. last Saturday and 20 Sunday and I try at least 10 every day.

Jess Cobb is here--he has filed on a claim that is only a couple of miles from here and will stay with us till it is time to live there. Tell you it is nice to have him here for he is so good to help papa not to say anything about having company. You get so sick of seeing Russians and hearing them spiel Dutch. You ask them anything and its

"Ich nicht fur stehe" and they shrug their shoulders and look idiotic. Sometimes you fool them and try (?) to ramble off a little Dutch and then they can't do enough for you. Ah! we don't live in the United States any more for this is "Little Russia."

Say, do you remember the Herrons, who used to live near Viroqua? Well you know they live twenty miles north of here on a claim and I was up there a week ago. (Mr. Herron is Mrs. Rayner's brother and Mrs. Herron is the Horton girl who adoped Nellie Mutch's baby--now do you know them?)

I went up to stay a few days, when the children went back from visiting here, but I had such a fine time that my stay lengthened into two weeks. I felt rather strange in a real house but I survived and tried not to be too green.

There is a settlement of young people from Kentucky about six miles west of Mr. Herron's and they are surely a jolly bunch. There is a Fannie Grey and her brother, who live in a dug-out in the side of a small hill. They are fine. We were there to supper one night and the whole crowd there to dinner one afternoon. You can tell they are used to things for the table was set up fine with good silver and nice china. Fannie is a good cook although she never did any till she

came out here and that was sometime in May. She always had a coon to do her cooking, washing, etc. They are building them a nice little cottage now so the days of their sod shack are numbered.

Fannie was at Herrons the first week I was there and on Sunday Mrs. Herron invited the five Kentucky boys over besides the folks were there and a Russian family by the name of Lempke. (23 in all.) -- not all Lempke's though. I was to go home that Sun. with the folks but times were too good so I stayed.

The next week we picniced on the Cannon Ball, went to a swell supper and a dance at the sheep-camp-ranch (in my honor) and I had to tear myself away on Saturday - missing a dance - ten miles west - just because I had stayed so long.

Well, I hope Viroqua is as lively as we are out here. Now guess we are even on the writing deal so dont forget to write soon.

Lovingly.

Bess

(Cobb, July 31, 1907)

The first line of Bess' letter may be a clue to her enthusiasm for just about everything associated with prairie living. She is not about to give her friends back in Wisconsin even the smallest hint of hardship on the plains. It's a wonderful place; there isn't time to do all the wonder-

ful things there are to do; and it's a wonderful life all the way around--a pity they can't be enjoying some of it along with Bess. While Bess says she has done some sewing, mending, and fancy work, one is left with the impression that she has spent most of her time out doors, sometimes gardening, but more often riding--riding across the fenceless, roadless prairie on a spirited bronco, free and wild.

Bess has been baked as brown as "the Russian inhabitants," but that's all to the good because sunbonnets and kid gloves are such a bother anyway. And North Dakota is a marvelous place for dressing casually, in the "old duds," "the old timers."

She jokes about the flatness of the land, perhaps foreshadowing the many jokes that are made today on that subject. She brags about her "shack" and her "crops" and likens her life to "camping," which probably sounds better than describing the primitiveness of a sod shanty. Yet even the people who live in dug-outs have class; you can tell they "are used to things" by the good silver and nice china used to entertain with. There are picnics and dances and parties galore, and even old neighbors from out Viroqua way that Bess has visited.

The glowing description almost makes one feel sorry for people stuck back in Wisconsin, or Iowa, or Illinois. According to Bess Cobb, North Dakota is the promised land.

In another three years (1910), the "promised land" was promised out. There was no more homesteading to be done,

no more free land to be staked out and plowed up. Later diarists would speak of cars and farm machinery and more modern homes. Women would write by the glow of an electric bulb instead of the light of a lantern or candle. If they got lonely, they would ring up a neighbor, or join in a party-line conversation. Times were changing; things were different.

But tucked away somewhere were these diaries which today offer us so much--the real experiences of real people written and remembered by real women. It allows us to reach back and grasp ever so tenuously a moment in the lives of those who went before us. It is a gift, a legacy from the thousands of brave women who came and helped build what is now North Dakota.

CHAPTER II

AND REVERY: REMINISCENCES

There is another way, other than through diaries and letters, by which one can discover what it was like to be a part of the pioneer experience and that is through the reminiscences of the women who were there. Not all kept a record as it was happening and, of course, few of their letters written to friends and relatives in faraway places were returned for safekeeping. However, these women did not forget, and when the WPA workers came around in the 1930's, they found hundreds of women, now grown old, who could remember with amazing clarity the sights, the sounds, and the sensations associated with being pioneers. Others were encouraged by family and friends to write down what they remembered in order that their children and their children's children might have a record of their pioneering days.

> Very early one morning, I awoke to hear my Dad and Mother in excited conversation. A new idea had come to my Father during the night, and he was telling it to Mother. The rising and falling of their voices, with a familiar word now and then, caught my attention, and though I was small and

> could not understand many words, I gathered that my parents were planning something new.
>
> There was much discussion about a new country and pioneer life; the hardships and things concerning it. I did not know what these conversations could mean to me, but sometime later Mother called my sister and I to her and told us that they had decided to leave our home, and everything we were familiar with, and make a new one in a new country far away. Uncle Sam had promised a new home to anyone who would go there and live. (Wothe p. 1)

As it had been with thousands before him, Opal Wanek's father could not resist the siren call of free land and infected his wife with the lure of adventure and excitement, though they were late arrivals. It was 1906 and nearing the end of the homesteading era in North Dakota when the Waneks pulled up stakes in Iowa and set out for the "black shack" near New England which they would call home.

Twenty-four years earlier (1882) Patricia Jensen's father, Hans, from as far away as Frondhjem, Norway, had also heard the reports of a wonderful country "Hvor der regner lemonade og man kan plukke sukkue toi fra marken" (Where it rains lemonade and one can pick candy from the ground) (Gordon, HDP).

That same year Bergit Iallo (23 years old) left Balders, Norway, on the steamship Heda of the Thingvalla Line. She

did not know then that she was never to see her father and mother again. She did know, however, that she was dissatisfied with living conditions in Norway, and the tales of the new world appealed to her. With relatives in Appleton, Minnesota, she decided to visit America (Helgeson, HDP).

Genevefa Hobi, in 1885, was working as a waitress in a hotel in Berschi, Switzerland, earning 75¢ a week. While employed there, she read a newspaper advertisement which stated that a man by the name of Henry Miller wanted a Swiss girl to work on his farm in the United States. Mr. Miller would pay her transportation over and $1.50 a week in wages, what seemed like a great deal of money to Genevefa. And she quickly accepted (Miller, HDP).

In 1880, Anna Trongrud and Christian Lee were married in Gibrlstine, Norway, and in 1881, Chris, along with two brothers, left for America. In the fall, Chris sent for Anna and she left October 13 on a fishing vessel for Bergen, where she boarded a boat to cross the ocean. "She came alone, with a three month's old baby to take care of, and unable to speak one word of English" (Lee, Anna, HDP).

Former neighbors of the Adlers kept writing of this marvelous place called Dakota Territory, urging them to leave Pine Island, Pennsylvania, and settle nearby. In May, 1881, they loaded seven children into two covered wagons and headed west, taking with them a yoke of oxen, a team of horses, three milk cows, two calves, fifteen chickens, and one turkey (Adler, HDP).

Francis Dodd Laughlin wrote his niece and her family in Des Moines, Iowa, a little more realistically of "vast prairies in their original primitive state" and of "the great opportunities for young persons to obtain land with little money." However, he cautioned Jennie about the "hardships to be borne, much hard work to be done, and loneliness." Henry and Jennie Laughlin took a year to decide, but finally opted for the rolling hills and beautiful sunsets described by Uncle Francis. They left for Carrington in November, 1884 (Laughlin, HDP).

For Catherine McDonnell, who had originally settled with her new husband in the woods near Greenfield, Ontario, the decision was easier. "Any place where we wouldn't have to grub stumps, year in and year out, looked good to me, and as for hardships we had that anyway and this would be something new" (McDonnell, HDP).

Something new, something better--for varying reasons they came, men, women, and children they came by the hundreds and thousands, some making the journey alone, others as a family, still others in groups. Land . . . fertile, level, stoneless land. With woodlands along riverbanks. And free besides! The newspapers proclaimed it; friends and relatives confirmed it! Visions of sugarplums danced in heads, and it wasn't even Christmas.

Getting there, for most, was an adventure in and of itself. For some, it was an "adventure" lasting six or seven years. A man might work a couple of years to book his own

passage to America and upon arrival, settle with relatives in Iowa or Wisconsin. a stopping-off place until such time as he had earned enough to send for his wife and children, often two more years. Once his family had arrived, it might take a couple more years before circumstances would permit a move farther west.

Ingeborg Sherva's husband Andrew was just such a man. He had left Jevnaka, Norway, two years before and emigrated to Iowa where friends and relatives had gotten a start. Then, in 1870, he had sent for his family to join him, and Martha, eight years old at the time, remembered the trip well. Her mother, two brothers, and a sister piled into a neighbor's horse-drawn cart, along with all their worldly possessions, and headed for Christiania.

> The road . . . was hilly and the big-footed farm horse was slow, but they reached the city before noon, in plenty of time for the driver to feed and rest his beast before returning. The sights of the city were interesting and stimulating to the children. As the iron tires of the cart rattled over the cobblestones, they began to meet large vans and city drays pulled by heavy horses and their country cart seemed small indeed. (Olson, Martha, HDP).

Martha recalls in detail the sights, sounds, and smells of the harbor as their eyes searched along the dock for their

ship, the Roska, which would take them, along with many other emigrants, to America. "Mrs. Sherva was sick during the whole voyage and did not fully recover until the party had reached its destination in Iowa. It devolved upon Mary and Martha to look after the younger children" (Olson, Martha, HDP). Even so, to Martha--who never got sick--it was a marvelous adventure. She watched the sailors and anticipated approaching icebergs by the cooler air which preceded them.

Disembarking in Quebec, the family completed the journey by train. Martha observed "country so different to Norway, the costumes seemed to quaint and eccentric and I never tired of watching the landscapes from the [train] car window and listening to the people when the train stopped at a station" (Olson, Martha, HDP).

Andrew Sherva met them at the train station and the family settled down on the farm where Martha's father held a good job. It soon became apparent, however, that "if they wanted to be landowners, they would have to emigrate to one of the new districts where free land was available" (Olson, Martha, HDP). However, it was six years before the opportunity presented itself.

In 1876, talk was going around among the Iowa folk that a group was being organized to take up land in the Goose River Valley in North Dakota. The Shervas and six of their seven children, Martha included, joined the party and were soon underway. Five covered wagons formed the train along with some cattle and sheep. Each day, except Sunday, they

were on the trail by eight, stopping for an hour at noon and making up for the night about five o'clock. A campfire would be started with the wood gathered during the day as they walked beside the wagons, and the evening meal would be prepared. After supper they would sit around the fire, and oftentimes Lars Thorsen would get out his fiddle and the young people would dance.

Martha has happy recollections of the journey--congenial and optimistic traveling companions, ideal weather, country that was fertile, with lush and plentiful vegetation. Sundays the small caravan did not travel but remained in camp to allow the women folk to do the washing and the baking. On July 11, 1876, the group arrived at the Paul Johnson farm on the Goose River. "They had been five weeks making the journey and had been very fortunate. There had been no accidents, no sickness. They had lost no equipment and had arrived in good shape. . ." (Olson, Martha, HDP).

Anna Christianson has equally pleasant memories of the trip west with her young husband:

> In company with seven other families, each in a covered wagon, the wagon train started out for Mayville, North Dakota, in June 1899. Many cows and other livestock were brought along by men on horseback who herded them along.
>
> Although the trip took three weeks to make, it was rather interesting to them all. The women folks would often ride in one wagon and have a

> coffee party or a sewing bee, at which time all of the women would sew for one person. In this manner time passed quickly.
>
> Each night in making camp they would place their wagons in a circle inside of which they would build a large bon fire from logs which had been picked up during the day along the trail through timber.
>
> Each family did their cooking over their own fire and when darkness came they all gathered around the bon fire to keep warm, and by the light of the fire they enjoyed their evening planning their future. Sometimes they would have a square dance on the grass to the tune of a violin, guitar, and accordian. (Christianson, Anna, HDP)

For others, it was not nearly so pleasant. Christine Westom Anderson has vivid recollections of the weather. "Sometimes [we] almost froze, sometimes [we] almost roasted, and the mosquitoes were very bad, especially near watering places" (Anderson, Christine, HDP). Olena Haagensen, on the other hand, made note of the wretched traveling conditions stating: "The prairies were terrible to travel over, the roads were only trails, on the whole road from Grand Forks to Pleasant Lake, they passed three houses. . . . Near Sheyenne they encountered terrible roads, the mud and water came as high as the wagon hubs. After 12 days of traveling through mud, rain, and poor roads, the travellers came close

to an abandoned farm house, and they decided to camp there until the weather changed" (Haagensen, HDP).

"It was a very tiresome journey," recalls Anna Marie Larson Berg, whose baby cried nearly all the way. Anna and her husband and small baby were heading by wagon for Cooperstown in 1883. The cattle they were bringing along made slow travel even slower, and Anna remembers the afternoon of the first day out of Hope: ". . . a rain storm came up. There wasn't a house or dwelling of any kind in sight, so Mr. Berg arranged a tent, out of blankets over the heads of Mrs. Berg and the baby. The baby didn't like this at all . . . and cried harder than ever" (Berg, HDP).

Gjertrud Knudson Simonson would have welcomed the crying--her baby died and was buried along the trail (Simonson, HDP). This, of course, was not an isolated incident; a number died trying to get to the "promised land."

Not everyone came by wagon, however. For some, the journey consisted of a trip across the ocean, varying in length from weeks to months, and a ride across country in immigrant cars to their destination. "We never thought it was so far from the Ocean," remarked Oline Ericstad Jorgenson (Jorgenson, HDP). These pioneers endured seasickness, poor food, discomfort, loneliness, and being witnesses to much death. "The trip . . . was terrible," recalls Oline. "It stormed all the way across. We were all terribly sick" (Jorgenson, HDP). As for the food, she says, "About all we had to eat was hardtack" (Jorgenson, HDP). Genevefa Hobi

Miller recalls being assigned to a room on board ship which she shared with nine other passengers. Everyone ate at one big long table, family style, and Genevefa describes the meals as fair, mostly potatoes and meat, sometimes a vegetable (Miller, HDP). In 1878, Emelia Ellerman Schwartz accompanied her mother on an immigrant vessel bound for America where her father had gone six years before to check out prospects. They traveled in the steerage section, hundreds huddled together, the different nationalities separated, sleeping in bunks along the wall and passing through lines with their tin basins to secure food (Schwartz, HDP).

Unpleasant as all that may seem, there were those who experienced even worse--children who contracted measles, cholera, or other communicable diseases and died, young women who died in childbirth, old people who did not have the stamina to survive the hard conditions. Louise Mathilda Christopher gives a vivid description:

> 22 people died, and many others will. Most of them were old people. Funerals were held every Sunday and sometimes on Monday, very early in the morning, in order to have the wind just right for lowering the bodies. Captain Larson read a prayer and made a short speech before the casket was lowered over the edge of the ship. The caskets were made by some of the men aboard ship. Whales followed the ship for days and dropped behind when

the bodies were overboard. (Christopher, HDP)

The Jensens got as far as Chicago before having to stop to get medical care for their two youngest, afflicted with cholera. While the parents stayed with the sick children, Patricia and her sister and two brothers were sent ahead, by train, to Mayville, where an uncle met them. Her younger brother and sister both died in a Chicago hospital, and Patricia remembers her parents arriving alone in Portland, her mother wearing a black veil (Gordon, HDP).

Patricia had at least had company on the train ride and was met on arrival by a relative. Britha Grotte did not enjoy either of those luxuries. Timid and frightened, Britha traveled from Norway alone. She had a half-day lay-over in Minneapolis when changing trains, and she describes the situation in the third person:

> Britha spent the time sitting in a hotel with her little chest beside her, very lonely but determined to speak to nobody. She was without funds and would have liked to purchase a meal just for something to do. She was not hungry as there was still food in the chest and in fact some was still left when she reached Larimore.
>
> On arrival at Larimore there was no one to meet her as she was three days ahead of schedule. She did not know exactly wh[illegible] as she walked the station platform still carrying the chest. She

> She was still determined to talk to no strangers if it could be avoided. It became apparent she would have to approach someone and seeing a fat, good-natured man standing on the platform she unfastened Paul Johnson's letter (offering her work in North Dakota), which was pinned beside her waist, and showed it to him. He at once spoke to her in Norwegian and told her he would assist in getting her across to Northwood. (Grotte, HDP)

For Britha, the tedious journey and the frightening experiences associated with it ended well. For others, it was not so. Inga Larson and her small child arrived in Dakota Territory to join her husband only to find that he and his brother had been found dead in a well they were digging on the claim (Anderson, Inga, HDP). The despair this young woman felt must have been overwhelming, though she stayed and built a new life, marrying Peter Anderson sometime later.

First impressions of this new land were widely mixed. Some were enchanted by what they saw--blue skies, luxuriant growth of grass, an abundance of wild prairie flowers. Others saw nothing but emptiness, dryness, desolation. And still others, while being initially unimpressed, found the place growing on them as time went by. A few never did learn to like it in Dakota though circumstances prevented their leaving. "Oh! This was a God-forsaken open country among the Indians (1880) . . . when we [Mary and her sister] reached my stepfather's homestead [Pembina County] I was

ready to go back to Toronto but my mother cried and begged me to stay and [said] I'd like it after while but I've been here nearly fifty-eight years and that's a long time and I still don't like it. . . . if I had the money today I'd still go back as this country never did anything for me but make me unhappy" (Moriarity, HDP). Most of those who felt that strongly about it either found a way to leave (and many did) or made a better adjustment.

There is little question but what the men were the driving force behind coming to the Dakotas and settling the land. It was primarily the men who were captivated by the offer of free or cheap land, glittering opportunity, wide-open prairies. The women and children, for the most part, followed reluctantly, leaving behind family, friends, and familiar things. The fact that the glowing accounts so often sent back home describing this country as a land of milk and honey were exaggerated contributed greatly to the negative feelings many women experienced upon their arrival. Jennie Laughlin arrived in Carrington via train in November, 1884, and was amazed that she "could see every house in town and not a tree" (Laughlin, HDP), a dreary sight for someone used to the woods and orchards of Iowa. Paulina Schlueter Clark spoke of days spent following a narrow prairie track, the eyes of everyone in the party "searching the vast prairie for sight of some living humans. They didn't pass a house along the way and didn't see a living soul. . ." (Clark, HDP). Mayme Crider rode out to

the homestead on the running gears of a wagon with nothing to see for miles and miles but prairie and hills. She noticed the cracked ground here and there and wondered how they could live in such dry country (Donnybrook, 1900) and whether they should even try (Crider, HDP). Newlyweds Frank and Emogene Chaffee headed for Dakota Territory from Mansonville, Quebec, shortly after their marriage, arriving in Carrington April 1, 1885. The next day they hired a horse and buggy and drove out to their homestead to look over the land and choose a location for the house. "There had been a deep snow the winter before and the country was very wet and muddy. Mrs. Chaffee was more discouraged than before as they plowed through mud and water to their farm, the mud was up to the horse's flank and over the hubs of the buggy. She was sure she could not stay in Dakota Territory; in fact, she did not unpack her trunk until way into the next winter and it was even longer before she finally gave in to the fact that this was to be her permanent home" (Chaffee, HDP).

Over and over again, these women express their initial reaction in similar terms: endless prairie . . . a few small huts . . . barren . . . lonesome . . . bleak-looking . . . depressing . . . vast distances . . . wind . . . desolate. A litany of despair and a longing to return to what they had left behind. It was raining when Thiliman Bourque and her family arrived at their shanty near Grand Forks in March, 1882. Rain was leaking through the roof,

and there was no place to sit and not enough pans to catch the water. Thiliman remembers her mother sitting down on the bed--the only dry spot--and crying, "Isn't it terrible when you can't find a place to sit without water dripping on you?" (Bourque, HDP). No doubt many women cried upon reaching their destination, momentarily overwhelmed by the reality of the situation into which they had been thrust. For Pauline Schleuter's mother, it was too much. Camped on the prairie, Mrs. Schleuter grew hysterical while the men were off watering the horses at the river. She cried; she screamed; she laughed. "She made so much noise that the Lubenows in their sod shanty a number of rods away heard her and came out to see what the trouble was. They were very glad to find that there wasn't any trouble. Mrs. Schleuter cried and cried, begged Mr. Schleuter to return to the east where they had come from" (Clark, HDP). Apparently the woman's hysteria was not considered serious enough to be labeled "trouble." Does this mean it was such a common occurance that it got small notice? Does it reflect a particular attitude toward women? Or does it merely illustrate a time less sensitive to mental anguish, more attuned to the "buck-up, grin-and-bear-it" approach of life and its travails? Whatever the reasons, there was no turning back for the Schleuters, and Pauline says her mother eventually became more her old self and acclimated to the new land.

The new land did not strike terror in all hearts, how-

ever. There were those who found a special beauty in the sea of waving grass, the flowers, the plentiful fowl. Mary O'Neil remembers her first trip from Minnewaukan to their new home. "Being springtime the prairie was all green with grass, and wild flowers were growing here and there. Passing by they saw many broods of small ducks swimming around in the water with their mother. It all seemed like a picture. . ." (O'Neil, HDP). In June, 1887, Lena and James Johnson put up their first hay crop. Lena commented that "it really seemed a pity to cut into the grass, it was so colorful. The tiger lilies were so thick all over the fields and so beautiful. The wild roses were in full bloom" (Johnson, Lena, HDP). It was actually hard for Lena to work as she loved to stand and gaze across the fields. For the Gronles, the new land was all they had thought it would be and more. According to Emma Gronle, "the farther they went the more pleased they were with the country. They all thought it was wonderful. The vegetation was grand, the grass was thick and green, and early in June was higher than the knees of the horses. The wild pea vine was very plentiful. This impressed them, as they had always heard that this plant grew only on rich land. There were thousands of prairie chickens and wild ducks" (Gronle, HDP). Such was the scene during the early 1880's in the Red River Valley.

Three years later and a little farther west near the rolling hills of Coteaux (southwest of Devils Lake), Edna Wheeler Matthews found the country very beautiful: "The weather was delightful at eventide, wild roses were in

bloom, the breeze made a gorgeous sound as it passed through the tall grass, coyotes howled at a respectful distance" (Matthews, HDP).

Whether they liked it or not, the women were there, be they yet children, young single girls, married women, or widows. They had arrived, a new life was beginning, and they had little time to think about their likes or dislikes, for there was much to be done--houses to be built, ground to be broken, gardens to be planted.

Not surprisingly, a roof over one's head was of primary importance, so if there wasn't an abandoned claim shack or a previously-constructed dugout or a sod house already on the property (and most often there wasn't), then the first project to be tackled was building a shelter. During the interim, the settlers made do. "This is where we stay," said Catherine's father after surveying the land near Cavalier. "We bought provisions to last us for a few months and then we camped under the trees . . . along the Tongue River. We used the wagons for bedrooms and used the open air country for our kitchens and dining rooms. We had to live under the trees like this until October 15, 1875. My father and my husband builded their log house and then one for us on our land" (Johnson, Catherine, HDP). Making do sometimes meant pitching a tent until a claim shack could be built.

> Monday morning we went to my aunt's claim and pitched our tent in her grove. Mother wanted

to get a tent before we started but Father thought it would not be necessary as he would get lumber and build a shack at once. Mother needed new sheets so she bought a bolt of heavy unbleached muslin and tore it into five-yard lengths which she stitched together saying it would be better than nothing if we should need it and it was--better than nothing. We made the top and sides of the muslin and the ends of rag carpet of which we had a quantity. My aunts fixed a shelter at one end of our tent.

We had two kids in our tent and at the foot of Mother's bed they fixed a place for me. Over my bunk there was a sag in the muslin which they could not seem to straighten. When it rained it caught the water and leaked--and it rained almost every night. To keep myself dry I took half a dozen milk pans to bed with me and when I felt a stream of water trinkling over me I placed a pan where it would do the most good. When I knew by the weight it was full I dumped the water on the floor which was only bare ground. I had an old buffalo robe over me, but as it was full of holes it wasn't much protection from the rain. We each took an umbrella to bed with us and about the time we were dozing off someone would yell, "Did you put an umbrella over the flourbarrel?" So some-

> body had to tumble out of bed to see.
>
> (Towne, HDP)

This living arrangement continued from mid-April to August, 1880. "We . . . moved in on the fourth of August. I remember the date because it was my mother's birthday. We had the floor laid and one side up but after the tent it was a palace. We could sit in a chair without one of the legs sinking into the ground" (Towne, HDP).

Sometimes some kind of dwelling would already be there, abandoned for whatever reason, and these deserted shacks provided temporary--and not always so temporary--shelter. Lulu Page describes theirs, located just north of Carrington:

> The shack had two small rooms and was built of single boards; there were cracks one could stick his or her finger through and they used only a small part of their furniture there. One room they used for a kitchen and dining room and the other for a sleeping room, having bunks built on which to sleep as there was no room for bedsteads. That summer [1885] they must always have an early supper; they did not have lights as it would be impossible to sleep for the mosquitoes.
>
> (Russell, HDP)

The raising of a home on the prairie was often a family project, with the women actively engaged in felling

trees, mixing mortar, and placing sod bricks. The women worked right alongside their menfolk and when they didn't . . . things sometimes went awry. William Heffron had Ike Isaaks help him build a shanty near Michigan, North Dakota. When Mrs. Heffron came out there in May, "she just took one look at the shanty and started to laugh. . . . The panel door was on up-side down, the window was up so high that she had to stand on a chair to see the horizon through the window and the shingles were put on with about six inches to the weather and none of them were overlapping so you could see daylight through the roof" (Heffron, HDP). The hardships were real, the work was backbreaking and unrelenting, but still there were moments of laughter.

A few enterprising women put up a shack for themselves. Anna Oaks came to North Dakota shortly before the turn of the century (1898) and worked near Cando until her marriage to J. E. Miller in 1900. For three years, they lived in his sod hut until she realized "he was not a good man" (Coiner, HDP), at which time she left him. On November 2, 1904, Anna filed on land near Stanley, but did not live there. It was in the spring of 1905 that George Wartchow and Tom Miley took her out to her claim and helped her put up the framework. Anna finished the rest herself. She originally put tarpaper on the outside; however, the wind ripped it off in no time, and so she replaced the tarpaper with rubberoid, which lasted for years. Her first stove was a homemade fireplace, built by piling rocks up and putting her

fuel on the inside. Anna built her own henhouse in 1907, her own granery in 1909. It was well Anna was so capable as her second husband, A. J. Coiner, died in Montana looking for better opportunities, and her third husband, William G. Reynolds, was "a poor provider" and she divorced him soon thereafter (Coiner, HDP).

Though these women left behind much to come to this new land--family, friends, comfortable homes, traditions--they did not leave behind their determination to make a new home and create a new life. Trinkets and photographs, be linens, rugs, favorite pieces of furniture, if possible, accompanied many of the pioneers on the journey west. Many, of course, had to rely on their wits and whatever materials were available to furnish their homes or at least add a homey touch. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence to suggest the women saw to it that their houses--be they dugouts, tarpaper shacks, sod shanties, or frame structures-had a curtain at the window, prairie blossoms on the table, pictures on the walls, a rag rug by the bed, or freshly-gathered hay on the dirt floor. A touch of beauty to brighten their personal corners, a bit of relief to the eye and the spirit in the face of isolation, drudgery, and hard times. "Having an accumulation of 'Youth's Companion' papers on hand I spent some time in covering the inside walls with them, much to my daughter's delight, and in giving her regular lessons in reading, writing, spelling, and sewing," wrote Amelia. "After the first appearance of the pasque

flower--'crocus' we called them--our homes was never without a bouquet of wild flowers all summer, violets blue and yellow, tiny white grass flowers, trinnes from Hawk's Nest--Japanese dandelions, daisies, roses--and those wild roses! Acres and acres of them, flax flowers, baby-breath, blackeyed susans, lovely blue bells and many other caused no hardships to keep our glass containers filled. The beautiful and varied prairie grasses adding much to graceful appearance of our wild garden bouquets" (Wilder, HDP). Eliza Bechtel plastered the inside of her dovetailed log house with a lime and clay mixture and then whitewashed the walls. Later she pasted cheesecloth on them and added wallpaper which made it very homelike, as she remembered (Bechtel, HDP).

The Kerlins had moved to Dakota in 1886 at the request of their minister, the Reverend Mr. Stewart, who wanted a Pennsylvania couple to care for his house and farm his land. The house was a little larger than most--four large rooms, two upstairs and two downstairs. Setting up housekeeping with two plain iron bedsteads, an Acorn cookstove, a rocking chair, a sewing machine, a baby buggy and a cradle, Laura Kerlin and her husband set to work making a house a home. Laura fashioned stools from nail kegs which had been left from the building, making calico cushions to match the curtains. She made ticks filled with hay for the beds. Carpets came from Pennsylvania, and grocery boxes served as cupboards. "Mr. Kerlin built their table of tamarack

wood. Writing home to her mother and describing her new home, Laura stated that she had a 'Tamarack Table' which sounded quite grand, but she did not state that it was home-made and of tamarack lumber, which was inferior in quality but inexpensive" (Kerlin, HDP). Call it pride, call it indulging in a little deceptive self-aggrandizement, here was one pioneer who was not going to cast doubts on the glorious tales that had filtered back east concerning this land. Her relatives would not be privy to grim stories of hardship and deprivation. Not only was this the land of milk and honey, the bounty was being served on a tamarack table!

Pauline Clark remembers that keeping up appearances was important to her mother as well. These women may have been far from "civilization," yet they carried the customs and the social mores with them, modified perhaps but ever-present. Pauline remembers a particular pair of pillow cases her mother kept tucked away in a trunk, saved for special occasions such as when the minister would call or company would come and spend the evening. The pillow cases were white, laced at one end with a bright red ribbon, and tied in big bows at either end. After the guests had departed, the pillow cases were carefully folded and placed back in the trunk to await that next special occasion (Clark, HDP). Resources may have been limited, but the women still found ways to honor the rules of hospitality, reserving the pretty pillow cases, slipping on the "Sunday" apron, bring-

ing out the handmade lace tablecloth, for their guests' enjoyment. It also allowed women, even in so lonely and barren a place, to adorn themselves and their homes and a touch of beauty, a bit of tradition, and alleviate--if only briefly--the drudgery that dominated their lives.

Upon arrival in the new country, young girls often "worked out," whether they had come alone or with their families. It was one of the few jobs available to them and was a composite of housekeeper/cook-baker/babysitter/ gardener/clothes-washer/cow-milker/ and even field-worker on occasion, in one combination or another. The hours were long, the work was hard, the pay was low, and the help was young, scared, and often unable to speak the English language. Yet it did allow these young women to keep body and soul together while getting a fresh start in a new country or to contribute to their families' well-being. Usually they did this type of work no more than two or three years, most often just long enough to receive a proposal and assume all those tasks for their own households and at even less wages. For many, of course, it was a much better arrangement than they had known in the old country where they might work from four in the morning until late evening and earn only $5 and board for a year's labor.

Rachel Thompson McKay recalls this period of her life (1884-85) as being the very worst she experienced. Rachel's fare to America had been paid by her uncle, but she had to find a way to support herself and pay back her debt, so

she naturally sought a position "working out." "She had never been on a farm in her life, never worked for anyone, and could not speak one word of English, nor could she understand any" (McKay, HDP). She went to work for a Mrs. Ferguson, who expected her to work "early and late" and insisted on teaching her to "talk English." The method Mrs. Ferguson employed was one in which Rachel was required to learn the names of all the objects in the house and farm-yard, and then she was taught how to put the words into sentences. Apparently it worked, for after three months she could speak "fairly understandable English."

> The work was all new to her; up at four every morning, she went to the pasture, got the cows and learned to milk, learned to make butter and cheese, as well as help cook, wash, iron (these three a godsend, as they were familiar work, in an otherwise new world). Rachel would go to bed at nine or ten o'clock, depending on when the work was finished, completely tired out, and cry herself to sleep. This she did for ten long months, receiving $10 per month as wage. (McKay, HDP)

At the end of those ten months, she could "speak fair English, milk a cow in record time, and make first class butter and cheese." But she had decided she couldn't stand it any longer so she drew her money and went to Devils Lake

where a friend, Signe Groven, helped her find work in the Norway House. She describes it as being "like heaven . . . to go to this Norwegian hotel and hear her own tongue and meet people who understood her and she them, not only their language, but their outlook on life and sharing the same memories" (McKay, HDP).

Kathryn Manning's memories about working out included scrubbing the kitchen floor every Saturday night by candle-light, moving the candle along on the floor as she scrubbed. She also remembered baking bread once a week in a stone oven outdoors. Her father had not liked seeing his daughter work so hard, remarking, "They will kill that girl." But Kathryn's mother replied, "Well, she wanted to go so let her get a taste of it." Six months was enough of a taste for Kathryn and she received $3 a month for her labor (Manning, HDP).

Working out in town apparently held more prestige than working out on a farm, at least according to Emma Gronle. She states that any girl who succeeded in holding a job in town for a year held a place of distinction in the eyes of the other girls. It was referred to as "going out to work for the Yankees" (Gronle, HDP). It also meant working in pleasant surroundings, earning more money, and, perhaps most important, learning the American way of doing things.

So in February, 1883 (despite their parents' misgivings about winter weather), Emma and her three cousins decided to head out for Grand Forks to seek their fortunes. The

plan was that they would be driven the sixteen miles to Thompson where they would catch the train into Grand Forks. Then Emma, Tillie, and Gro, along with their wagon driver, Ole T. Gronle (the future husband of Emma), started out. It was very cold; however, they had not been traveling long when the temperature started dropping and it began to snow, and soon developed into a blizzard. The trail disappeared and the snow piled up higher than the horses' knees. The group continued to inch their way forward, huddling together to keep warm in their cloth coats, finally arriving at Thompson some seven hours later.

Emma remembered how forlorn they felt, four young women, none of whom were over eighteen, gathered around the stove in the station, on their way to a strange place to look for jobs among strangers. But they were a determined, courageous lot, and, when thawed out sufficiently, they continued their journey by train, arriving in time for supper. They registered at Knutson's Hotel, had a good night's sleep, and after a big breakfast in the morning, felt a lot better. Their plan was to canvas door-to-door for positions, each taking separate streets and calling only at the larger houses. A large house indicated a large income and the strong possibility of the occupant needing household help, according to the girls' way of thinking. Emma rang 25 doorbells before she found an interested party: Mrs. Snider was willing to pay $1.50 per week if Emma could start immediately. She took it. The other girls also

found positions and began working--and learning (Cronle, HDP). Sometimes with comic results.

In looking back, Margaret Fladland Lut recalled being told one evening to put water on to heat for the children's bath which she interpreted as "polish the silverware" and which she did. She doesn't reveal whether the children got baths that night or not (Lut, HDP).

"Was I proud when I went home and could speak English," reported Oline Jorgenson (Jorgenson, Oline, HDP). She started right in teaching her family how to speak the language, and within several months they were all speaking it fairly well, so well they never spoke Norwegian unless they were excited about something.

Not to learn the English language was to suffer embarrassment and social stigma. This was America and it was important to be American and speak American. Not only that, it was important to be able to communicate with your neighbors, and English was the common tongue. Children, of course, learned most quickly and helped teach their elders. The period of transition was sometimes painful, though later one could see the humor in it. Annie Blackstead did not understand the language or the people and kept to herself and her kind as much as possible. However, one day she had to go to the store to purchase envelopes. She did not know the English word and did not dare ask in Norwegian. Somewhere she got the notion the word was "howards," so she tried that, complete with gestures, but to no avail; Mr. Lee

never did understand what it was she wanted that day (Blackstead, HDP).

There was still one common language and that was the language of love. Young people, whether of the same nationality or not, fell in love, then as now, and wanted to marry. Being in love was not a requisite, however, and many marriages more closely resembled a business transaction constituting an exchange of services (e.g., You need a husband; I need a housekeeper). The manner in which they were wed varied as much as the reasons for doing so. When circumstances allowed, a wedding served as a welcome social event; if not, couples got the knot tied any way they could and took up the business of making a living off their plot of land. "Some weddings were very quiet and some were quite an affair," recalled one pioneer. "Most of them ended up in a big dance. I remember that eating was the big feature in those days. Of course, the bride was showered with many beautiful gifts from all her friends. And then the stealing of the bride's shoe was much practiced in our time. The shoe was sold to the highest bidder and then the best man had to pay most of it and sometimes all of it. This money was then turned over to the bride as a present" (Branchaud, HDP).

One of the more quiet nuptials was Eliza Marlenee's. "We just stood up on the dirt floor in my father's house before the justice of the peace and were married. There was no music, no sermon, no ceremony to speak of" (Marlenee,

HDP). Nor was there for Henrietta Kennean's sister. She and her husband-to-be, along with two witnesses, were headed for Pierson, Canada, and the services of a priest when they met him on the road. Since they were all gathered together anyway, their marriage was performed right there, the open prairie serving as their cathedral (Keenan, HDP).

If a minister or priest were not available, a judge would do. And if the judge was out of town, even that problem could be overcome. Louise Christopher recalled Ed Kelley, the local sheriff, doing the honors under such circumstances. Asking the young couple to raise their right hands, Sheriff Kelley inquired whether they were willing to take the other for husband (or wife) and when they answered affirmatively, he raised his own right hand and said, "Married, by God! Two dollars" (Christopher, HDP).

Mr. C. Rowerdink, the county judge of Emmons County in 1893, was out helping thresh for the Van Soests when Esther and John Postle sought his services to marry them. "Mrs. Rowerdink gave us the necessary books and blanks and we drove to the Van Soest farm. We found Mr. Rowerdink in the field. He accompanied us to the house, washed his hands, and united us in marriage" (Postle, HDP).

Courtships preceded some of these marriages though not all by any means. One aborted romance illustrates poignantly the inferiority felt by some of the immigrants. Austa Vrem was working out in the Kritchel home in Montevideo, Minnesota, during the early 1870's. While employed there,

Austa met and became engaged to Mr. Kritchel's brother. One evening, while at a dance with him, she overheard some of the girls in his crowd making fun of her mannerisms and her clothes. As a result, Austa told Mr. Kritchel to find someone in his own class, breaking off the engagement. Soon after she met Tom Johnson whom she married in 1875, coming with him and their daughter Inga to North Dakota to homestead near Minot some ten years later (Johnson, Austa, HDP).

A courtship with a happier ending was Ole and Emma's. Ole had been interested in Emma since he came to North Dakota, but she was in no hurry to get married. "Ole kept pressing his suit and not getting anywhere," as Emma put it. Finally in the spring of 1884, he told her that "if she would not have him, he was going to move back to Iowa." Emma decided he meant it and gave her consent, being 19 years old at the time. She wore a navy blue dress, complete with basque and overskirt, trimmed with rows of gold buttons down the front, a navy blue straw hat to match. "The groom wore a new grey salt and pepper suit, for which he had paid $22.00 in Grand Forks" (Gronle, HDP).

Ole Gronle was not the only one who needed a wife to "make it" out on the prairie. It was a well-recognized fact that a woman was practically indispensable if a man was to be successful at homesteading. It took two and growing sons and daughters to handle the work load. Peter Hintz told Bertha Shutt he couldn't make any money if he didn't have a wife and a home of his own . . . and soon he "popped the

question." In Bertha's words, she "felt sorry for him so accepted his proposal." They were married in October, 1887, by Judge Lunch as there was no minister in Hankinson (Hintz, HDP).

Even less romantic was Wilhelmine Friedrike's introduction to her future husband, John Johnson. "A young man had arrived seemingly for a friendly call upon her employers. He spent the night in the home and the next morning, to her great surprise, the lady of the house told her he had come to marry her. This woman had recommended Wilhelmine as a good housekeeper and their friend made it his business to propose to her. . . . On April 22, 1883, she was married to John Johnson and they left for Page where he had filed on a homestead" (Johnson, Wilhelmine, HDP).

Whether an auspicious occasion--or otherwise--memories of marriage evoked some interesting anecdotes from women looking back over the early years: Early-day entrepreneurs saw opportunities in the marrying business, secular circuit riders who traveled between settlements, a permit to marry part of their baggage, and offered their services to young couples--for a reasonable fee, of course. John Ruggles was such a fellow, conducting one of the first prairie weddings, in this instance uniting Minnie Fisher and Herman Bohn (Clark, HDP). The fee would have had to have been extremely reasonable for Thiliman and Oscar Bourque to be able to afford it. They had but $1.50 in cash when they married January, 1885, in the Catholic Church in Grand Forks

(Bourque, HDP). Eliese Lehfeld took one look at Dakota Territory and prepared to get back on the train and return to Chicago--until she heard someone tell her husband-to-be he ought to send the hothouse plant back to Chicago (Lehfeld, HDP). They were married on August 26, 1883, and since they couldn't afford a trip, they walked to the school hill instead (1/4 mile northwest of New Salem). According to Mary Adler, "She had so many beaux she did not know whether she got the right one or not," adding quickly that she had been "very happy with her husband" (Adler, HDP). Gertrude McCumber recalls her mother-in-law stating many times that the only reason she let Gertrude have her boy was because she had mended a torn handkerchief so well, the result of a playful scuffle by the young lovers (McCumber, HDP). A bit more on the bizarre side was Justice of the Peace Charlie Morgan's insistence that the remains of F. G. Callan's first wife be buried (frozen ground had prevented earlier burial) before he took another. So the wedding party hastily dug a grave before proceeding with the ceremony and returning to friends already gathered at the groom's house (Callan, HDP).

Unusual for this country, but following Norwegian custom, when Siri Thinklestad's mother, a widow, married Peter Fyllevold, Peter changed his name to Thinglestad as it was his new bride who owned the land (Korsmo, HDP). And Emilie Christianson recalls with amazing clarity that October day in 1894 when she married Erick and prepared the wedding dinner herself: "roasted chicken and pork steak,

mashed potatoes and gravy, creamed green peas, salad (bananas, green peas, oranges and whipped cream), bread and butter, buns, cookies, coffee and cream, celery, and pickles" (Christianson, Emilie, HDP). Mary Meyer is equally detailed about her wedding gown--a dress of black brilliantine, costing $1.25 per yard for the dress goods and $3 for a seamstress to make it (Meyer, HDP). This was in 1875 and Mary was still wearing the dress in 1894 after her last child was born, though it had been made over many times to accommodate changing styles. At last the best part was taken and used for trimming other dresses.

Standing knee-deep in prairie grass, or on a dirt floor, or even occasionally on the freshly-hewn floor-boards of a tiny church, these young women joined together with young men and promised "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part," and they all received ample opportunities to prove their good intentions and share the good times and the bad. It may have been eating, drinking, and making merry one day, but it was rolling up the old shirtsleeves, plowing, and making hay the next. There was a land to tame, a country to settle, and they, pioneers all, needed to be about it.

Once a roof was over their heads, the pioneers could turn their thoughts, and their energies, to the next consideration: food. The women were full partners in this enterprise. In addition to caring for the house--cleaning, cooking, washing--the women were responsible for raising

large vegetable gardens- cabbage, radishes, lettuce, tomatoes, potatoes, and raising chickens, along with the egg-gathering chore. Sometimes the women did the milking, too, and, of course, took care of the cream and made the butter. In their spare time, they helped with the field work, breaking, plowing, seeding, threshing, haying, and, when their husbands were away (and they frequently were) they served as foreman of the place, fighting prairie fires by themselves, taking care of stock during blizzards, keeping fires going inside to ward off winter cold. Then there was the baking--loaf after loaf of bread, cookies, cakes, and pies; sewing for the whole family; and canning wild berries when in season and if sugar was available. More often than not, they carried water every day and helped keep the woodpile stocked. Gathering buffalo chips in their aprons for a little extra money was not an uncommon sight. Still women found time for such things as religion, education, writing letters, keeping journals, and even having some fun--planning a picnic, going to a dance.

As if all this were not enough, soon the babies started coming, one after the other, sometimes as many as a dozen or more and regularly at least six or seven. None of the other chores went away; raising a family merely added to the list.

Childbirth and child-rearing were no mystery to these women. Most of them had helped raise large families of brothers and sisters and sometimes even assisted with their

entry into the world. "It was on a hot summer night, July 16, 1877, at the age of fourteen, that I first officiated as a midwife," remarks Christine Stafne (Stafne, p. 33). "How proud I was when I called the boys and Father from the granery, where they slept in the summer, for I had prepared breakfast and had our new baby sister washed, dressed, and ready for display" (Stafne, p. 33). Sometimes, not even the services of a 14-year-old girl were available. Young women were often left alone in tiny cabins while their husbands went for help; sometimes they would arrive back in time, sometimes not. John Hillius returned from an overnight search to find his wife and a new baby lying in bed, the room half-filled with freshly fallen snow since there had been a storm in his absence and no panes in the windows of their sod house. Mrs. Hillius had delivered herself of a child (Hillius, p. 4). The lucky ones had the services of a midwife or a neighbor lady. Mary Connally's husband, John, trudged through knee-deep snow in March of 1885 to borrow Nashs' oxen and bring back an old German woman, Lena Barley, to assist with the birth of his first son (Connally, HDP). Etta Place's husband, James, had gone to town with a load of wheat when their first child was born in July of 1886. Fortunately, Mrs. John Lange, a new settler, was visiting at the time and helped with the delivery. A month later Etta was able to return the favor for Mrs. Lange (Place, HDP).

This was how some women entered into something akin to a career as midwives, from neighborliness to a profession

of sorts, and they continued to assist women in their "confinement" until state law prohibited it. In the early days Emma Gronle did it without charge as "nobody had anything anyway" (Gronle, HDP). Gradually, however, there was such a demand for her services, she began to charge--$5 for each baby and $1 per day. Even after doctors took over for midwives, she still assisted many, or as Emma put it, "If Dr. Peterson knew she was on a case, he never hurried." Emma delivered, or helped deliver, over one hundred babies, and she "never lost a baby or a mother." Clea Lindvig was another who served as midwife to expectant mothers, fifty-three by her count (Lindvig, HDP). "We had no powder, salve or boric acide in those days; I burned flour to use for powder, made salve by boiling cream or milk, and cured the sore eyes of many a baby with milk from the mother's breast." For many, many prairie mothers, a midwife served as doctor, nurse, maid and companion during those first few days following birth.

People were putting down roots, hardy folk undaunted by the weather, the work, or the prairie wilderness. They married, built their homes, had children, planted their crops, and lived out their lives, without fuss or fanfare. "There were no hard times, just life," one pioneer woman remarked rather matter-of-factly (Kramer, HDP). Perhaps that remark as much as any typifies the pioneer's attitude--a kind of acceptance of things--as they were, with little complaining or wishful thinking. Maybe it was because there was little

time to reflect on life and its meaning, or maybe it was because only the strong, perservering ones stayed. Whatever the reason, these women seemed to be able to take it--the good and the bad--assimilate it, and get on with the business of living. There was no turning back.

What was it like 100 years ago, plopped in the middle of a vast prairie? How were one's days lived out? What was the daily routine? As it is with all of us, no woman's experience exactly duplicated another's. Some knew more sorrow, others more joy; some prospered, others went broke; some loved the life of a settler, others but tolerated it. Reading the same story retold hundreds of different ways by as many different people offers a check on reality. "Yes, this is the way it was" can be said with more assurance when one has 500-700 witnesses to the event. These are real people remembering real moments, the everyday experiences that go into the living of one's life.

What does become evident without reading very far is that these women were a very enterprising lot. Out of coffee? Brew some from roasted barley. No money for shoes? Make a pair out of an old overcoat. Short on cash? Sell eggs and butter to general store merchants in nearby towns. Or bake bread for the bachelors in the area. Or sew aprons which could be sold and used for gathering buffalo chips. Need a school for the children? Start one in your home. Or pool your resources with several families and hire a teacher. It was an era of "can do" and "make do," sometimes against

overwhelming odds.

Of course, a major activity was providing sustenance, by such means as planting and harvesting, hunting and fishing, and preparing food. For some pioneers, the "pickings" were slim (during the early years). Bertha Roeder remembers growing up under such circumstances: "The food set upon the Roeder table for many years consisted mainly of potatoes, bread with syrup, and once in a while meat. . . . Many times the children cryed because the[y] had to eat potatoes again for another meal" (Madenwaldt, HDP). Potato bread, potato pancakes, and potato soup were staples of many of the settlers' diets. A summer garden the following year offered the Roeders some relief--peas, beans, greens, and beets did well, as did the turnips which were pulled in late fall and stored in the root cellar--a shallow hole under the house where dried fruits and vegetables could be stored for winter use. "These turnips were then boiled and mashed and a sprinkle of salt and pepper and a very little lard was added to the dish before it was set upon the table. Even turnips were filling but the children as well as the mother and father grew tired of them" (Madenwaldt, HDP). Sophie Kallenberger Berk recalls equally monotonous menus: "That winter [1886] their breakfasts were usually a soup made of corn meal and water with a little salt added. At noon they served bread, if they had it but, if not, this meal was omitted. Their evening meal consisted of ribble soup, made by dampening flour making a paste, rubbing it between the

hands and off the fingers as when a woman removes bread dough from her hands when baking bread. This paste was cooked in a kettle with water" (Berk, HDP). There's no question but what they met the daily requirements for starch in their diets!

Things did improve, of course, as the homesteaders acquired some stock--pigs, poultry, and cattle--and as they learned what would grow here and what they could substitute that was available on the North Dakota prairie. Laura Stewart Kerlin was one who made some surprising discoveries in this area. Dandelions, once the land was cultivated, grew abundantly along with other weeds which could be used for "greens." Lambs quarters, wild parsley, and pigweed, if used when young and tender, made delicious dishes. A bush called the buffalo berry grew in the sandy soil of Kidder County, and the tiny blue flowers it sprouted in spring time gave way to thick bunches of small, green berries. These would be stewed until tender and seasoned with either butter or cream. Laura claimed one could scarcely distinguish them from young green peas. Rose Lips, a berry emanating from the wild prairie rose (later named our state flower), could be stewed and the pulp strained through cheesecloth. The juice would be cooked with a little sugar until it had the color and consistency of tomato butter. Again, Laura testifies to its deliciousness when used as a topping on bread, biscuits, or pancakes. Another sauce topping could be made from the tiny fruit found at the center of the

"pincushion" cactus plant.

Pie plant had been a favorite of Laura and her family out East (Pennsylvania), and a neighbor lady acquainted Laura with wild sorrel, a prolific wild plant of the prairie, which had much the same flavor. Placed in a pie crust and baked with sugar and butter, it was hard to tell that it wasn't real rhubarb.

Chokecherries, juneberries, wild strawberries--all made marvelous eating in a land where fruit was almost non-existent. What could not be eaten fresh was canned or made into jams and jellies for winter use.

Wild turnips and onions were there for the gathering, along with certain herbs and spices. Laura discovered "white polka dots" growing on a large sod stable and learned from a Dr. Harcourt that these were edible mushrooms and, for the next fifty years, she made use of this food source, even making a catsup from them.

Wild game was also plentiful when the early settlers arrived: antelope, deer, rabbits, some buffalo, ducks, geese, prairie chicken. And it wasn't always the menfolk who did the hunting. Martha Ann Huston, for one, went out on a summer day when she was out of fresh meat and her husband was away: "She took her husband's shotgun and creeping through the tall grass on the east side of Turtle Lake got up to the water's edge and fired point blank into a large flock of geese sitting on the water and was lucky enough to hit a large fat goose which she took home in triumph to her

children" (Huston, HDP). Women developed self-sufficiency under these conditions and did what had to be done. Fish, for those living near a body of water, offered even more variety. Amanda Hunter Olson spoke of catching fish with pitchforks, tossing them upon the bank, after which they would load them into the wagon box, take them home, and scale them with curry combs, and preserve them in a barrel of salt brine (Olson, Amanda, HDP).

For all the times they may have gone without or had but meager rations, still there were those, like N. Johanna Kildahl, who looked back with yearning ("it makes my mouth water") to some of the treats of bygone days--"delicious rich milk, thick yellow cream, cottage cheese, and other cheese, which we enjoyed so plentifully in those days. . ." (Kildahl, p. 13). Pleasures were simpler then it would seem--a dab of sugar for one's coffee or a sweetcake for dessert was enough to label an occasion "special."

To read of procuring and preparing food by prairie pioneers takes a few minutes; to actually do it consumed a major portion of their time--no food processors, frozen foods, microwave ovens, and the like to aid them. So it was with the clothes they wore. Few of the pioneers had access to ready-made clothing. Even fewer would have been able to afford it if it had been available. The bulk of this labor was tended to by the women, taught from their earliest years the homemaking arts--cooking, sewing, and cleaning. Occasionally, one reads of Father helping card,

or sitting by the fire knitting on cold, wintery evenings. ("Father would buy a whole bolt of dress material for dresses for his seven daughters. During the long winter days he would help mother sew, having had training as a tailor in Sweden" [Erickson, p. 3]). But there was no question as to whose responsibility it was. Only a handful had sewing machines, at least in the early days, and so all garments had to be handmade. Carding, spinning, knitting, crocheting, stitching, dyeing, darning--activities almost as time-consuming as food preparation--filled many more hours. The list of needs was long: socks, underwear, mittens, mufflers, petticoats, dresses, overalls, suits, coats, caps, even shoes. North Dakota's cold winters insured there was heavy, warm apparel and plenty of it. Mary Lee said, "She [her mother] made all their clothes but their shoes, using denim, flannel and calico. A new calico dress was an important event to the girls of the family and was kept for dress occasions for a long, long time. The girls wore denim dresses and the boys and father overalls and jackets of the same material. Hilda, one of the girls, purchased the first hat she ever owned by snaring enough gophers and selling their tails. Her first shoes, copper-toed, were purchased for school, and her feet, so used to their freedom, protested nightly" (Lee, Mary, HDP). Some were not as lucky: Johanna Aageson walked in homemade wool stockings and boys' shoes to her first day of school three miles away (Peterson, HDP). Pauline Schlueter Clark re-

members getting one new dress a season, dark brown or blue denim. Last year's dress, if not outgrown, became a second dress. "The little girls wore aprons of bright prints to cover their dark dresses and these aprons were washed with the weekly wash but the dresses were washed only every four or five weeks at the most. The men and boys handed down their trousers and shirts when they out grew them. . . . The underwear was made from red or blue flannel. The girls' underskirts were many yards of flannel gathered on to a belt at the waistline and for Sundays these dark flannel skirts were covered with white full skirts with yards of lace at the hem" (Clark, HDP).

As might be expected, the long skirts were cumbersome attire for prairie living. If they got wet, they became extremely heavy. If it was muddy, the mud would cake around the inside hem. Cora Amerland's solution to this problem was to save the cobs off the corn for cleaning purposes (Amerland, HDP).

Sometimes, however, those long skirts served a very useful purpose--in fighting prairie fires. Spring and fall were especially bad times for prairie fires. Every man, woman, and child kept an eye out for smoke trails, ready to drop everything to protect their own land and crops or a neighbor's. Fire breaks--strips of grass burnt away to prevent a fire from spreading--were the most common form of protection available. According to Catherine Budge Stibel, a fire was spotted off in the distance by the Budge family one afternoon

in 1882 (Stibel, HDP). The family watched fo hours, taking turns throughout the night, one always keepi g vigil. Come morning, the fire was still traveling in the r direction and toward two stacks of flax straw they had ha d-picked from the fields. Soon these too were burning a d the flames were coming dangerously close to the fireb eak the family had prepared the night before around the h ouse and buildings. A wider strip of firebreak was hastily pr pared, each child old enough to handle a pail of water and et rags pressed into service to help contain the flames. "The fire kept coming closer and in two places jumped o er the firebreaks." It was then Catherine's mother slipped o f her new polonaise skirt and beat at the flames. Catherine following her mother's example, took off her only new ress, a heavy blue and white polka dot, which had been made for her less than a month before, and also attacked the sp eading blaze. Two skirts were lost, but a shanty--the Budg home--was saved. A fire two years later claimed a neighbo of the Budges', Mrs. Gessen, who died trying to untie the stock in the barn as it was enveloped with flames. Such tr gedies were not uncommon.

With much of the prairie still virgi grassland there was little that could deter a good blaze o ce it was started. Thousands of acres could be burned in a re lly bad fire. Sarah Rustom describes vividly the worst on they ever had. It was May, 1883, and

> . . . when they got up in the morning the sky was hazy and the air was full of smoke. There was a strong Southeast wind blowing. By three o'clock in the afternoon the smoke was so thick it was difficult to breath and almost as dark as night.
>
> All day ducks and geese were flying in to the lake [Devils Lake], the surface entirely covered with them. In fact, all wild life was making for the lake. The only time she ever saw antelope was this day when a herd of them went by a short distance from the house, going to the lake shore. There were also deer on the lake shore.
>
> The men were away from home three days, trying to check the fire and save the homes of the settlers. Their place was safe because they were surrounded by sloughs. The fire swept clear north into Canada. (Rustom, HDP)

Borge Johnson describes dead grass which was three to four feet high in places, and so thick it was matted. "The fire roared like thunder. Sometimes at night they could hear them roar from fifteen miles. The flames would rise as high as 10 feet in the air" (Johnson, Borge, HDP).

Hair, whiskers, eyelashes, eyebrows, even clothes would be singed or burned off by the fires. Many times an animal would be killed and skinned and the carcass, bloody side down, dragged across the prairie by a horse. Sacks would be soaked and used to extinguish the flames. Prairie fires

threatened lives and livelihood and demanded constant vigilance on the part of everyone. The fires, however, did not always wait until everyone was home to pitch in. Women often battled the blazes alone. Mary McMahon Connally, seven or eight months pregnant, was home alone when she spotted a prairie fire coming. Her husband was hauling grain to the elevator in town (New Rockford). However, a granery full of wheat stood right in the path of the approaching fire, not to mention their chickens and other possessions. "She gathered up wet sacks and a broom and ran a mile to where she could fight the fire. She carefully burned the dry stubble and put it out with the broom, trying to make a break for the fire. However, the fire was a bad one, with a good wind behind it and it would jump over her break. She fought fire for a long time, wondering how she could bear up under it. Her feet had the shoes almost burned off them; her hair, eyebrows, and clothes were all singed and she was completely exhausted. However, she successfully kept the fire from burning all they had worked for . . . but whenever she thinks of this fire of 1891, she wonders how she could have fought it off and the memory is a nightmare to her" (Connally, HDP).

With spring and fall being the vulnerable times for prairie fires, one might have supposed summer offered some respite. Not so, however. Instead, summer offered hail-storms and cyclones, intense heat and high wind with nothing to deter its gale. But, most of all, it offered mosquitoes

and grasshoppers. The mosquitoes were so bad at times they drove the men indoors and forced the women to line their dresses with paper and drape the paper over their backs. Grasshoppers, on the other hand, were more than a nuisance; they destroyed crops and gardens. Mrs. Frank Carlson recalls walking home from town with some sugar, coffee, and cabbage. The grasshoppers ate the cabbage up entirely before she reached home. She could not hang her washing outdoors to dry because the hoppers ate the linen (Carlson, HDP). Christine Hagen Stafne's mother made the mistake of hanging her things out on the line after a heavy rainstorm: "The water had soaked through the wood roof during the night. Mother hung the damp bed clothing, our clothes, linen and special hand work which was watersoaked, on the line to dry. This . . . left its impression on me, because the sudden appearance of the grasshoppers and their eating Mother's silken finery she had brought from Norway" (Stafne, p. 24). To rid themselves of the pests, at least temporarily, Turi Solum relates how the farmers would tie ropes to the corners of a blanket, with two of them pulling the blanket by strips over the grain causing the grasshoppers to take flight (Solum, HDP).

Blizzards, associated then as now with North Dakota winters, ought to have come as a relief. And in some ways they did. But Mother Nature has always been temperamental, and the pioneers frequently set out for a neighbor's or for town on a bright, clear winter day only to have the sky

darken and snow begin to fall in a half hour's time. Even a trip to the barn to do the chores or gather wood could be hazardous.

> One day in Jan. '87, James had gone over to Johnson's in the morning. About ten o'clock it got cloudy and in a very short time it started snowing and the wind came up.
>
> Lena decided that she had better get in a pile of wood while she could. The 1st trip she made to the woodpile, the storm was pretty thick and she was only a little ways from the house when she couldn't see either the house or the woodpile. . . . She kept on walking, turning every little while and going the opposite direction so as not to wander to far from the locality of the buildings. She got colder and colder and still could not find the house.
>
> After she had been walking for an hour or so, she heard someone hollar, not very distinctly but enough so she could catch it. She guided herself by this sound and finally came to the house where she found James. He had come home thro the storm to find her gone. He did not dare to leave the house for fear he would get lost and she might come back by chance and need his help. So he tried shouting in the hopes of her hearing him and

following the sound. (Christianson, Lena, HDP)

Similarly, the Lees had a small calf out in the stable when the temperatures started dropping and the snow began falling. Fearing the calf would not survive the storm, Mary persuaded Chris to accompany her out to rescue the small animal. By the time they headed back for the house, they couldn't see their hands out in front of them. Chris carried the calf with Mary close behind. The wind was in their faces and they were making little headway: "I suddenly realized that I had become separated from Chris. I was terribly frightened; but kept on walking against the wind. I came to a snowbank that I knew was between the house and the barn. Just as I started to climb up the bank I stepped on something soft. I soon found that I was stepping on Chris and the calf. The wind had tired him so badly that he sat down to rest. . . . The storm lasted three days (Lee, Mary, HDP).

Such narrow brushes with death were not uncommon. Helen L. Posey, 15 years old at the time, accompanied her mother and three younger sisters (her father was a bookkeeper who worked in town each winter) on a visit to neighbors eight miles away one winter day. What began as an enjoyable experience turned into a harrowing one:

> We started out early, reached our destination, had a lovely dinner, and we children had a glorious time while our elders visited. We really stayed

longer than we should. Our neighbors were great people and the day was so wonderful.

Finally around three o'clock we got started which should have seen us home before dark. We hadn't gone far when I noticed the snow beginning to sift along the ground. I hurried the team a little but was not particularly concerned. Before long it was coming pretty fast, so I turned to look behind (northwest) and saw what looked like a vast grey wall moving down on us. Of course, I knew then what we were in for, so whipped the team to a fast trot and we raced along ahead of the storm, but not for long. Almost immediately it was upon us--a howling, shreiking, wind, driving a whirling mask of snow ahead of it, obscuring the sun, and bringing early darkness.

We were nearing a farmstead, but as I knew the people regarded the sacred laws of hospitality with about as much reverence as is accorded now to the Prohibition law, I decided that rather than be unwelcome guests I would try to make the next place. It was not a wise decision under such conditions, but we passed on.

We hadn't gone far until I noticed the horses did not keep to the road as they should. By this time between the storm and the increasing darkness, I could neither see the horses heads nor the

road, so I got down on my knees in the front of the jumper, and watched the road, and whipped the poor horses, who were now lunging along at an awkward gallop. The wind was like a hurricane and seemed to be coming from all directions at once. The air was so filled with the icy particles of snow that it was almost impossible to keep ones eyes open, even if one could have seen any distance, my mother and the children were well covered up, but I knew they could not stand it long. As for myself, I was so worried, and so busy keeping the team going and in the road I did not have time to think.

At last when it seemed as though we must have missed the place, and were lost in the storm, I saw the faint gleam of a light, never was I so thankful for anything. I drove into the yard and just as we reached the door the man came out. "Get right out and come in and I'll be right out with the lantern." were the welcome words we heard. I helped my mother and sisters out and started to unhitch, and when our neighbor came back with the lantern we found the reason for the horses leaving the road. Their eyes were frozen over until they were completely blinded. (Posey, pp. 2-4)

For two days and two nights the blizzard raged, Helen and her family sharing the humble fare of their hospitable, though poor, neighbors--oatmeal gruel for supper, bread and syrup for breakfast. "The wind howled around the house like a million demons . . . and we had to hug the stove pretty closely to keep warm." The dawn of the third day it was "bitterly cold but clear as a bell" (Posey, p. 4). About noon Helen, along with her mother and sisters, headed home, arriving cold but safely and thankful to be alive.

Another storm, back in 1872, kept Julia Sandgren buried alive for three days. "The house . . . was drifted under the snow which completely covered the doors and windows. She had plenty of fuel and provisions, and could get snow by just opening the door and taking it, which furnished what water she needed. The daylight did not get in and she had no clock so she had no way of keeping the time. She had everything she needed but it was very lonesome" (Sandgren, HDP). A neighbor once again came to the rescue and dug her out shortly before her husband returned home.

Sometimes the settlers would dig themselves out after such a storm. L. Amelia Pease Wilder recalls such a time: "Upon opening the door to the outside world a solid wall of snow confronted us--we were literally buried in a solid snowdrift. Fortunately the spade was inside the house and soon a pile of solid white blocks were on the floor, and a passage up a cararra-like stairway gave us a way out of our imprisonment, and we saw blue sky and sunshine and a white

landscape everywhere" (Wilder, HDP).

For some there was not such a happy ending. Two neighbors, Augusta Bladow Kempke and Minnie Lierman Krause, recalled the January day in 1887 when Mrs. John Frundt lost her way and froze to death. Left alone with five children while John went to town to buy a cow, Mrs. Frundt ventured out to secure a neighbor's help in caring for the stock. Mr. Grohnke agreed to come over shortly; however, Mrs. Frundt was anxious about her children whom she had left alone, so she started back alone. She never made it. The next morning neighbors, out in a search party, found her huddled up not more than a quarter of a mile from home, frozen to death (Kempke, HDP).

During the blizzard of 1890, many people lost their lives in storms. "Mr. Wolf and his wife were on their way home when they became lost. Mr. Wolf stood up in the sleigh in front of his wife to protect her from the wind. When they found them he was frozen to death and her arms were so badly frozen they had to be taken off" (Manning, HDP). Amputation, gangrene, death were realities of North Dakota winters, and few there were who were not affected either by the loss of a loved one or a neighbor, the loss of livestock, some reminder of the precariousness of existence on the northern plains.

Of all the hardships that confronted the pioneer women during the early days of settlement, perhaps none was so pervasive as the loneliness. Prairie fires exhausted them-

selves, winter snows melted, but the isolation ignored seasons and was a chronic condition. An 8' by 10' shack defined the perimeter of many women's world, peopled only by a husband--when he was not away for some reason or another--and children. Reference is made repeatedly to this lack of companionship, the aloneness. Olive Allord spoke of the area around Neche in 1870 as being "a desolate and lonesome country, especially so for a woman, there being no neighbors but Indians" (Allord, p. 1). She recalls crying for hours when her husband was gone, working as a carpenter in Pembina.

Anna Trongrud Lee remembers being left alone while her husband hauled wood--a two-day excursion--and how much she hated it, keeping a lamp in the window for Chris on the night he was to come home (Lee, Anna, HDP).

For almost a year Mary O'Neil saw no one other than her family and her brother, Jerry, who had filed on a nearby claim (O'Neil, HDP). Mrs. Grinnell did not see another white woman's face in six months, and then she had to walk several miles to visit Thron Johnson (Grinnell, HDP).

Dora Quamme found the homestead a very lonely place. "No one came there, and there was no one to be seen, and the grass was high all over" (Quamme, HDP).

Loneliness, combined with a nostalgia for familiar faces and landscape, was a daily struggle. Etta "missed the trees more than anything. There were only two in that part of the country and they were at Locke post office. Whenever

James went for the mail she would tell him to bring her a leave or two from one of the trees growing there. She would put these in a dish of water and nurse them along until either she or James sent for the mail again" (Place, HDP).

Mary Meyer, to protect their claim from being "jumped," moved out to the property which was four miles north of Wahpeton. Mr. Meyer was working out at "Big Swede" Johnson's place to help make ends meet and could come out to the claim only every three weeks or so. "Mary tried to keep busy with the garden, two pigs, cow and children to care for but she was often very lonesome. She was very afraid of thunder-storms. On some Sundays she would go over to her neighbors, Pete Stolenwork, and get a ride with them to Wahpeton to attend the German Catholic Church. But that was not every Sunday because it was 3/4 of a mile over there and Julia was not more than 1/2 year old and had to be carried. When Mary did go she was always invited to spend the whole day . . . which made the day go by and she was not so lonesome. . . . But there were times that she would not see anyone for two weeks. Many times she would go outside, stand and look in the direction where Mr. Meyer was working and cry because she was so lonesome" (Meyer, HDP).

Mrs. Luther Codding experienced similar feelings. She and her three children were deposited on a homestead while Mr. Codding worked in Valley City all week. She "disliked the country very much, the bigness of the country, with very few neighbors, and being away from all her relatives and

friends depressed her very much." Each Saturday night Luther would walk the ten miles home and each Sunday afternoon he would walk the ten miles back to town. Mrs. Codding and the children "would walk with Mr. Codding, a mile or so on his return trip, to a hill on their land, then would stand and watch him go away from them, while they had to return to the lonesome little home on the homestead" (Codding HDP).

Julia Orchard's introduction to this aspect of prairie living was immediate and traumatic. Arriving at Fishers' Landing (near Grand Forks) on October 1, 1879, Julia and her husband James and small son reached the hotel only to find everything in confusion--the proprietor's wife had just taken poison, saying she could not stand the wild and lonely country any longer. That same night Julia gave birth to a baby girl with no one to care for her but a woman who worked at the hotel. Three years later, in 1882, James wanted to squat on land near Devils Lake, so they relocated there and James continued his surveying work. It meant he was home twice between August 4 and the end of October. Julia says, "Those months were the longest and hardest of her life. She never saw a white person in all of that time. At night the coyotes would howl, frightening her so she was afraid to go to sleep. . . . The prairie grass was four or five feet tall, as far as she could see. It rippled in the wind, all the time, keeping up a whispering sound, night and day, and when the wind was strong, the grass waved, looking like an ocean. . . . This used to actually make her seasick"

(Orchard, HDP).

Seasick . . . homesick . . . lonesome . . . frightened --pioneer women were far better acquainted with such feelings than pioneer men, who enjoyed greater mobility and thus opportunity for interacting with people.

"I believe," said Mrs. Hans Lee, "that some of the women got sick just from staying home" (Lee, Mrs. Hans, HDP). Jennie Laughlin, for one, did not get into Carrington for several years after arriving in Foster County; subsequent trips to town were always two or three years apart (Laughlin, HDP). Louise Chartrand left her father's claim for the first time 46 years after arriving in 1889 (Chartrand, HDP). That, of course, was an exception.

Another side of this story was the social side. While one pioneer humorously listed "fighting fleas and mosquitoes" as recreation, many women wrote and spoke of the good times: the dances, the parties, the visits to neighbors, but especially the dances--welcome respite from the drudgery and monotony. Young and old would gather at a neighbor's, usually on a Saturday night, and dance until dawn. Gertrude Weber Huff remembers, "The music was usually that of a mouth organ, but George Pritchert had an accordian. If nothing better was at hand, the women would take turns playing on combs" (Huff, HDP). Catherine Johnson's husband "played the fiddle for all the dances until Mr. Irish came into the country [Pembina] and then they changed off. Mr. Irish had the women make strong tea and he would drink a cup every hour or so in order to keep awake all night. James [the pioneer's

son], about seven years old, would step dance for the crowd for a nickle. They danced square and waltzes in those days of 1878" (Johnson, Catherine, HDP). Another Pembina pioneer recalls a bit nostalgically, "Thos old time dances were so much more enjoyable than today and all we had was my father's old organ that they brought from the east when they came in 1877. Perhaps we had a fiddle or a mouth organ to go with the organ and many, many times we just had that old organ. I sure can remember when the straps would break that pumped the air into it, how we'd get along with just the fiddle until it was fixed again. Everyone took part in the music and in that way we didn't have to pay $15 to $20 for our music. You could dance all night without a dime in your pocket as long as you did what you could to make the evening pleasant. How well I remember the pants the boys wore to those dances. They were made from bleached out grain sacks all pressed and starched" (Branchaud, HDP).

And so it would be repeated, on tiny homesteads throughout the territory, a few families would gather, probably at the largest home (which was none too large) in the vicinity for an evening of dancing, games, card-playing, eating--a time of laughter, song, and friendly chatter amidst the work, the worry, and the ever-present loneliness. Each family would pack lunches and children into the wagon and head for the house party, the children to be tucked in the attic to sleep, the lunch to be eaten at midnight. The women often brought knitting and sewing; some even brought their spin-

ning wheels. "The guests were usually divided into two groups--the men on one side of the room and the ladies sat at the other side. Several times during the evening the ladies would have to open the door to air out the smoke-filled room. The ladies never smoked. Some of the half-breeds and older foreign women smoked a pipe" (Branchaud, HDP). Louisa remembers a party in her home where the "ladies worked so fast and talked so hard that the room sounded like a factory. It was the first social gathering in the settlement for several months so everyone had so much to talk about. One lady thought she was so smart and could knit without looking or paying much attention to her knitting. She talked and talked and as time passed she finished a sock. When she finished it she held it up and began to boast about how fast she worked. But when one of the other ladies looked at the sock she noticed that there wasn't a heel in the finished sock. Then everyone laughed at her and had a big time teasing her about her new fashioned sock" (Spreckles, HDP).

For the young people these dances were important enough to walk several miles to get to them. Bertha Madenwaldt attended her first dance at the Fritz Beadow farm when she was eighteen years old. She and her sister walked to the farm, danced until two, and then had to walk home. They "were so tired and cold before they reached home that they agreed they would never attend another party so far from home. But when the next party came they forgot about their

aches and pains, their cold fingers, and were ready to go again" (Madenwaldt, HDP). Held in the late fall, they once again walked home, barefoot, to save their shoes and stokkings. Their fingers were so stiff from the cold they couldn't unfasten their dresses so they crawled into bed, fully clothed, in their unheated room and pretended they did not know how their dresses had gotten so wrinkled when questioned by their mother.

Dancing, popular as it may have been, was not the only form of entertainment. Depending on the season, there were hayrides; sleighrides; picnics; card-games--Old Maid, Authors, five-hundred, cinch, whist, and euchre. At the schoolhouse near Marvin, a basket social was held every fourth Friday, the money raised going for church, school, or community projects. According to Effie Healy, "The baskets were decorated as fancy as the ladies could make them, each trying to fill hers with the choicest bits of food. A young girl would give her favorite young man some idea as to what her basket would be like so that he could bid on that. Some bids were as high as a dollar but the usual bid was 35¢ to 50¢" (Healy, HDP).

Oftentimes, one settler's home would become the social center of the area, because of its location, its size, or the fact that it was the place where church services were held once or twice a month. Such was the case with Emma Ludlow Wolf, whose homestead was located near Devils Lake. The neighbors would gather every Sunday for potluck affairs,

all nationalities and creeds--Irish, German, Norwegian, Swedish, and Jewish, some of them unable to speak the American language, others speaking with a "brogue you could cut with a knife" (Wolf, HDP). As Emma recalls the men would play baseball, sometimes the Norwegians against the Irish, these being hotly fought games. "The woman [sic] would sit around and visit and rest. Late in the afternoon, Mr. Colligan and Mrs. Wolf would sing, each in turn, and then together" (Wolf, HDP).

In some places, literary societies were formed, serving an educational as well as a social function. Fannie Dixon organized one in Morris Township in December, 1884. The women would meet once a month in each other's homes where they would "read such works as they could get hold of." Dickens was read and discussed more than any other author, but "probably that was about all they had to choose from. The group met for many years," Etta says, "and it is a bright spot in her memory" (Place, HDP).

It was not necessary, however, and often was impossible for the settlers to leave their homesteads in search of amusement. They entertained themselves during long winter evenings with whatever they had. Some had only a Bible for reading material, and, consequently, it was read several times over. Others had brought a few books, which were read and re-read, or subscribed to a magazine or newspaper from out East, if they could get to the post office to pick it up.

Sometimes they entertained one another. Describing

such events in her home, Christine Hagen Stafne says, "I don't suppose there will ever be a substitute for the piano when the children would gather around and sing the old tunes we loved so well. The orchestra practices started as they grew older, and were a little noisier than I appreciated, but they were so overjoyed when occasionally they were all on the same key and stopped in unison that any remarks we made were of little consequence" (Stafne, p. 74).

In addition, there was sewing and embroidery which was considered a form of diversion and an enjoyable past-time.

There was one other avenue of social exchange available to the pioneers and that was the religious one. "Most of the social life in those early days centered around the church," according to Nellie Van Meter Cousins (Cousins, HDP). The first summer the Van Meters were in Dakota (1883), "they drove to Carrington every Sunday in their spring wagon to attend the services. The first service was held in a partly built saloon, with the congregation seated on planks laid over kegs and boxes. However they sang, prayed, and listened to the sermon by their first pastor, the Rev. Charles Lane, preached from a pulpit of piled up lumber only a few feet in front of them. . . . There were various church socials held in the early [illegible] ticularly after the church was built as money was needed to furnish it. One . . . was a Soup Bubble Social given to raise money to buy lamps for the church so that they might have evening services also.

Small dishes of soap suds were placed around the room, together with pipes and makeshift pipes with which to blow bubbles which was the pasttime of the evening" (Cousins, HDP).

The settlers who came had a strong, quiet faith that sustained them through many of the difficulties they faced. Those who arrived on the scene fairly early were left to take care of their own spiritual needs. Nearly all had brought a Bible with them, and many also brought catechism lessons to teach their children in lieu of a minister. Where possible, they joined together with a couple of neighbors and worshiped together. Jennie Corrough Laughlin's mother had given her this advice when she left Iowa for Dakota in 1884: "When you go to the new country, go to church. There probably won't be a church of your own faith there but that does not matter, go to any church as there is no church that there isn't good in" (Laughlin, HDP). The Laughlins settled amidst a predominantly Swedish population where services were held in the dining room of P. J. Kollberg's house. Mrs. P. M. Nelson would lead the singing, Nelson Hague would read from the Bible, and someone else would give a short sermon. Although the services were in Swedish and neither Jennie nor her family could understand one word, she "felt better for having gone" (Laughlin, HDP). On the occasion when the Laughlins attended, a hymn would be sung in English at the close of the service. Coffee and visiting would follow, but just being around the people and

in a religious atmosphere satisfied Jennie.

It wasn't too long, however, before itinerant preachers and priests were making the circuit, holding services in homes, in schools, in whatever edifice was available. Each place they went, there would be weddings, baptisms, and confirmations to be performed as well as blessings to be given over graves that were months old. When enough people had settled in an area, plans would be laid for building a church, many of which still dot the North Dakota landscape. No architect was consulted, no contractor was hired. The pioneers themselves donated time and material to construct a place of worship, the menfolk being the primary builders, the womenfolk providing the furnishings and the finishing touches and raising the money through Ladies Aid to meet expenses.

With or without church buildings, however, the pioneers practiced a homely kind of Christian living--they helped out a neighbor, raised their families, endured their hardships, planted their crops, celebrated a birth or a marriage in the quiet presence of their God. "It was hard to get enough for the family to live from and it could not have been the food [we] ate that kept us alive and well. It must have been God that blessed that food so that it was sufficient unto us" (Solum, HDP). Such remarks typify the kind of steadfast faith possessed by many of the settlers, the women being instrumental in organized expressions of religious activity.

The women were instrumental in organizing educational programs as well, a somewhat ironic twist inasmuch as they themselves had sometimes been denied schooling. This is not to say their brothers had not also been required to set aside studies to help with the chores. According to the 1879-80 census figures, out of the 12,030 children of school-age, 8,042 were enrolled but only 3,170 attended at any given time on the average, or about 26 per cent (Report 1882, pp. 406-7). That figure rose to about 38 per cent in just five years with 87,563 children being of school age and an average attendance of 32,520--an indication of just how rapidly the country was being settled (Report 1886, p. 328). More boys (44,657) than girls (42,906) were enrolled, but not a significant number, and that figure remained fairly constant as the 1900 census revealed--47,846 males enrolled as opposed to 44,163 femals. Of course, as indicated by the above, enrollment did not necessarily mean attendance. Students might show up one day, be enrolled, and that would be the end of it. Austa Vrem is an example.

Austa had gone to school only nine weeks in Norway when her father, discouraged by the hard times there and his struggle to support his eight children, decided to come to America. When Austa got to America, she "went to school just one day, and that was only to visit; she wanted to go to school but she could not do so. She taught herself to read, but she never learned to do anything with arithmetic. . . . She had always wanted to be a nurse, but had had no

chance to learn anything about it, except as she watched her grandmother and listened to her, when her grandmother told about the cases she had cared for" (Johnson, Austa, HDP). Despite a lack of formal education, Austa developed her "natural aptitude" for nursing to the extent she was able to work many years as a midwife and practical nurse, assisting several doctors in the Minot area.

Caroline Knutson Burud experienced similar circumstances. She attended Norwegian religion classes and was briefly taught some reading and writing. Once the family moved to America, however, the school proved to be too far away for her to walk to it, and her parents made little effort to get her there, feeling "girls had small need for education" (Burud, HDP). Caroline taught herself the English language and some figuring, but was soon forced to seek outside employment and help make the living for the family. From then on, she made her own way.

Parental indifference and economic necessity were not the only obstacles which prevented young girls from getting some schooling, however. Sometimes social pressures played a role: native clothing, entirely appropriate in Germany or Norway, looked "funny" on the Dakota prairie, and having no shoes would similarly inhibit school attendance. Also, younger brothers and sisters sometimes ridiculed an "older" sibling who wanted to go to school. Catherine Zech's sister teased her--"a grown-up girl"--for wanting to enter first grade (Black, HDP). This dampened Catherine's spirits

sufficiently to make her decide not to go.

What is particularly interesting is that though they sometimes went to school but a few weeks and often but a few months, yet many of these young girls of the prairie learned to read and write, something that isn't always accomplished in twelve years today.

For the Johnsons, taking turns was the solution. Julia Johnson and brother, John, alternated terms, traveling sixty miles to Burlington to attend classes. Each would board there for the nine-month term, never once visiting home during the interim, catching a ride to and from with Joe Overholt, the mailman (Axel, HDP).

Lest a false impression be given, the early pioneers were certainly not anti-education. The majority, no doubt, wanted their children to go to school as evidenced by their efforts in that area. Seventy-nine per cent of the school-age youth were enrolled in 1885 and the following comment appears in the Report of the Commissioner of Education for that year:

> This vigorous Territory, excelling several of the states in expenditures for schools and accommodations for the pupils in them, shows striking growth at almost every point: more youth of school age by 10,064; more pupils enrolled in public schools by 19,004; more by 10,997 in average attendance daily. (Report 1886, p. LXIV)

However, there were obstacles. Usually it would take a couple of years to get a school organized, not being the top priority in a newly settled section of the county and not immediately having enough students to justify the effort and the expense. Julia J. Abbott was one mother who filled in the gap during those first years. She "kept regular hours for lessons, teaching them to read, spell and cypher. But best of all she unfolded to them [her children] her love of good literature. She owned the works of Longfellow and Tenneyson [sic]. She could recite most of Whittier's 'Snow Bound' and Scott's 'Lady of the Lake.' These were read over and over and their meaning made clear. Such stories as she could tell from Greek myths, and fairy tales" (Abbott, p.).

If the family lived close enough, the children would go to school in the nearest town. For Mary Rickett, this was Grand Forks. In 1873, Mary and her oldest sister began attending school there during the summer months for the next three years, a four-mile walk in the morning and another four-mile walk back home in the evening. The school was a one-room affair, the desks being simply sloping shelves nailed to the wall and requiring the students to face the wall while the schoolmaster directed activities from the center of the room (Rickett, HDP).

More frequently, a school would be organized within a district and pupils would come from the outlying area, all sizes, ages and nationalities congregated in one room with one teacher, usually not much older than the oldest students

themselves. At first the one room was often in someone's home; later it was a separate building, a white wooden monument to a people's determination to cultivate the mind as well as the soil. Johanna Peterson remembers they were required to study hard and attend strictly to their lessons. "There was no reading of fiction, and they were taught only what was good for them" (Peterson, HDP).

On the other hand, kids were kids, even in those days, and performed the usual pranks and got into trouble with the normal frequency. Sue Maloney remembers her first day of school in 1880. It was raining and the teacher was late. Since the door was locked, students pried open a window. Sue boosted her little brother, Charles, through the open window, and he unlocked the door for the others. Mr. Delaine got angry over this when he arrived and punished Charles with a ruler. So "Sue picked up all the ink wells she could find and threw them at him, then grabbed her brother and started running for home" (Maloney, HDP). Another time, when she was about twelve years old, Sue knew something unusual was going on because the teachers were instructed to keep the pupils at school a little longer that day. "She [Sue] whispered to a girl named Mannie White who sat near her telling her to follow. The teacher, Mr. Fansworth, was standing near the door, which was at the foot of the stairs. Sue slid down the bannister, nearly knocking him over, and ran out of the door, the other girl following. They witnessed a negro lynching, but had to stand in the corner at school the next day" (Maloney, HDP).

From a slightly different perspective, Lulu Page took the teachers' examination in the spring of 1887 and received her certificate. She first taught in the Melville Township School #2, with an enrollment of 25. Attendance was seldom more than fifteen, however. "The school was about 18 x 24 in size and furnished with desks for the pupils, a table and chair for the teacher, a blackboard, stove and anatomical chart for hygiene. . . . There were no textbooks furnished and the children brought any they might have at home so there was a great mixture; most of their lessons were learned from the blackboard and they used slates and pencils for doing their lessons. They were taught arithmetic, spelling, reading and writing and the older children had also geography, history, and hygiene" (Russell, HDP).

Some of the more common texts used in the little prairie schoolrooms were McGuffey's Reader, Barnes Historical Series, Pathfinder's No. 2 Hygiene for Young People, Eclectic Primary History of the United States, Sheldon's Modern School Fifth Reader (1882), and Anatomy, Physiology, Hygiene and Effects of Alcohol and Narcotics. A typical library collection, if there was one, might include Darwin's Origin of the Species, Holmes' The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, Sienkiewicz's Quo Vadis, Hugo's Les Miserables, Sewell's Black Beauty, and Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Catherine Johnson taught two months at a county school near Pembina for $20 per month, at which time the school ran

out of money. Students wrote on slates with slate pencils, reserving pen and ink for their copy books. The front wall of the school was painted black to provide them with a blackboard, and a large boxstove stood in the center of the room, with tree stumps suitable for burning stacked in the back behind a partition, along with a water pail and dipper. In addition a shelf to hold lunch pails and hooks to hold coats graced the back wall. Homemade seats wide enough to hold four pupils, separated by an aisle, completed the furnishings (Johnson, Catherine, HDP).

Pioneer teachers were remarkably imaginative and tenacious about overcoming the many difficulties they encountered in their profession. May Thomas needed six pupils to open her schoolhouse so she persuaded one of the mothers on a nearby homestead to enroll her five-year-old Bessie, even though it meant May had to carry her back and forth almost every day, particularly in cold weather and during the season of deep snows (Thomas, HDP). Mayme Crider gave programs and held box socials to raise money for school supplies. In addition, she agreed to keep the fires stoked, morning and evening, at the McCormick place if she could use the front room for a schoolroom. When necessary, Mayme bought books, paper, and pencils herself. Her daughter, Maybelle, was only three or four months old when Mayme began teaching, and she would carry her one and a half miles across the prairie each morning and evening to the McCormick "front-room school" where Mrs. McCormick would tend the

baby for $2 per week. "Even at that, the ladies in the community [Donnybrook area] would bring their babies to school and leave them with Mrs. Crider while they went to town" (Crider, HDP).

Just how tenacious these early school marms could be is illustrated by N. Johanna Kildahl's story of her trials in getting a teaching certificate in the first place. Johanna lived eighteen miles north of Grand Forks on the Minnesota side of the river when she was fifteen years old and eager to earn some money so she could get more schooling herself. Teaching country school seemed the only way. She walked to Grand Forks and caught the train to Crookston where she took the necessary exam. However, the next morning when Johanna appeared in the County Superintendent's office to pick up her certificate, she was informed she was too young, eighteen being the minimum age. As Johanna describes it, "At first, my heart sank but a voice within me said, 'I must have it'" (Kildahl, p. 2). No amount of cajoling would sway Mr. Brown. She sat in his office until noon, trying to reconcile herself to this catastrophe. She returned after lunch, determined she would not go home without that essential scrap of paper. She returned the next day . . . and the next. Finally, Mr. Brown, somewhat disgusted, said, "See here, little girl, there is no use of you sitting here in my office day after day, for I cannot give you a certificate" (Kildahl, p. 3). Johanna returned the afternoon of the third day, remarking, ". . . it would take

a Dickens to describe the mingled emotions expressed in the face, attitude and whole bearing of that most persecuted man; disgust, impatience, amusement, and, perhaps due entirely to my imagination, an effort to cancel a slight feeling of admiration" (Kildahl, p. 3). Concluding her tale of the battle of two wills, Johanna recalls:

> Near closing time Mr. Brown came to me and said, "Now little girl, if you come back in the morning I shall have to put you out and I should not like to do that." An inspiration came to me. With the sweetest and most ingratiating smile I could muster, I said, "I will tell you what I will do, Mr. Brown, I will lengthen my dresses and do up my hair in the most grown-up fashion and act as dignified as though I were twenty-five." I then wore my hair in a pig-tail, the prevailing style for girls in short dresses. He did not answer but sat down at his desk and began to work on some papers. Presently he came toward me with a long envelope in his hand and, upon handing it to me, said, "Here is your certificate. I <u>think</u> that you will succeed. Let me hear from you." (Kildahl, pp. 3-4)

Unfortunately, her victory was short-lived. Three weeks after school began, Johanna's mother was taken ill, and she had to return home, giving up her hard-earned certificate.

They weren't giving certificates for bravery at that time, but if they had, surely many of these pioneer women would have qualified, having passed the test many times over in the course of their daily lives. An area in which they gave an outstanding performance can be identified by one word: INDIANS! Nothing struck more fear in the hearts of women and children, and a lot of menfolk as well, than the rumor that Indians were on the warpath and headed in their direction. And nothing was usually what came of such rumors. The idea that the Indians spent all their time swooping down on wagon trains and scalping settlers appears a highly inflated one, dramatized by movie and myth--at least in North Dakota. The "bloody massacre," so graphically portrayed in film and fiction, was more often <u>of</u> Indians rather than <u>by</u> Indians. But the fear remained. As a result, "Indian scares" occurred rather frequently. A rumor would get started and soon someone would be riding on horseback from homestead to homestead to warn the settlers Indians were on the warpath. The settlers, in turn, would gather up whatever weapons they could find and go to a designated spot, usually a settler's cabin, where they would wait out the danger. An overnight, crowded together with men, women, and children and no sight of an Indian, would usually convince these pioneers that it must be a false alarm, and they would go back to their homes.

The country was not without its opportunities. Near Monango, North Dakota, the Erick Bjurs became suspicious

when several of these alarms, delivered by the same person, resulted in the surrounding shacks being plundered during their temporary abandonment. Anything of value would be taken--livestock, furniture, grains, and food supplies. So the Bjurs decided to ignore the warning, remaining in their shack to test their theory. Sure enough, several hours later the horseback rider raising the hue and cry returned to help himself to the Bjurs' possessions. Caught in the act, the thief left the territory and that ended the alarms, false or otherwise" (Bjurs, HDP).

Uprisings were but one part of the worry; more pervasive was the constant alert, the checking out the window, day and night, for a glimpse of a band of Indians. With the women spending so much time alone, they were naturally apprehensive. Often an Indian would just appear on the scene. Emma Ludlow Wolf, living on a homestead near Devils Lake in 1886, was in the kitchen frying doughnuts. "She turned round from the stove and saw an Indian man standing in the door, watching her. This startled her but she gave him a doughnut. He ate it and held out his hand for more, continuing until all that she had was gone" (Wolf, HDP). The Indian left as abruptly as he'd come and joined thirty or forty others camped about 80 rods away. Emma went about her work, "but kept her eye on the Indians." She could see them starting a fire, hanging a pail of water over it, and dropping a doughy mixture of flour and water into the boiling pot. However, Emma's visitor took one bite out of

this freshly-cooked "doughnut" and threw it on the ground, apparently disappointed with the Indian adaptation.

Food was very often the intent and purpose of an Indian visit.

> One day in the late summer of 1865 they [the Laughlins] had just finished their noon meal when Henry went to the window and pointed out that there were two Indian bucks riding toward their house from the North, with guns over their shoulders. Jennie told him to stay in the house until the Indians were by and they watched them ride up to the house. Henry then went outside to waylay them; they held out their hands in a friendly way and then asked, in their sign language, for food. They stood their guns up against the house and followed Henry inside where he asked Jennie to feed them. She set the table with their dishes and silverware and was glad that she still had a kettle of cabbage and another of potatoes on the stove; also that she had plenty of bread in the house. After she had put the food on in serving dishes, Henry told the Indians that they might sit down at the table. They completely ignored the plates and silverware before them and ate out of the serving dishes; one would eat by handfuls from the cabbage and the other from the potatoes and then they would exchange. The bread

> disappeared like magic; Jennie kept replenishing the bread plate and all [the bread] would go. Finally when she had given them almost three loaves of bread she decided she would watch to see if they were actually eating it; two men could never consume that much food. She then saw that they would empty the plate and tuck the slices of bread into their blankets so she decided that she would offer them no more or there would be nothing left for themselves. She was chagrined that she had given them as much as she had, only to be stored away in their blankets for future use. Later she learned that it is Indian "manners" to take all that is set before them. (Laughlin, HDP)

Sometimes these visits would be concluded with the smoking of a peace pipe, whether the pioneer liked it or not. Sometimes the Indians would merely get up and leave, their hunger satisfied, their mission accomplished. "One old squaw asked Kate and Mary Padden's father for a chew of tobacco. He handed her a 'plug,' she bit off a big bite and calmly put the rest in her jacket pocket" (Maresh/Padden, HDP). The dilemma of a displaced people, once so proud and independent, was already apparent a hundred years ago, as these native Americans resorted to begging for sustenance.

Anna J. Stark, Mandan, took fifth place in the contest sponsored by the Mandan Creamery recounting her experience with Indians, a part of which appears here. It was July 7,

1883, on the little homestead near Glen Ullin, and Anna was alone with her small son, her husband--Dr. Stark--off to attend a sick person some twenty miles away. In a most descriptive manner, she tells what happened.

> . . . I cleared away the breakfast dishes, straightened up our humble home and anxiously watched the wide sky line in the hopes of seeing some stray hunter or homesteader passing, or my husband returning from his tiresome journey. But through the open door and our two tiny windows, I could see nothing except the wavy heat lines rising into a brassy sky.
>
> Then suddenly it happened. My heart leaped with sudden fear and I became frozen with terror, for there, coming over the distant ridge was a long line of mounted men, and other small detached groups appeared on either side of it. Their waving eagle plumes, spears and other weapons, the dark, stern faces, told me that they were Indians. As they came toward the little shack, the long line of racing horses circled the place and swept closer and ever closer in a swirl of dust; the yells and cries of fierce faced warriors paralyzed me and I stood shielding my boy from what I supposed was to be instant death for him and a worse experience for myself.

Suddenly every horses head was turned toward the shack, and as they surged to within a few paces, plowed up the ground as the riders roughly jerked their nervous steeds to a standstill. Several Indians jumped off and advanced toward me, but stopped when within a few steps, watching me silently. I must have shown great fear upon my face, for I expected to be killed. Then one of the painted men who appeared to be a Chief or leader, turned to his mounted force and broke into a long, loud harrangue; every man dismounted and sat down in front of his horse, with the long rope which was tied to the horse's underjaw, in his hand; the Chief laid his tomahawk upon the ground, turned to me, advanced, held out his hand and said "Hao." I did not then know that his actions and word were those of a friendly greeting, but my instinct told me that the proper thing to do was to take his proffered hand, and so, with my small son clinging to my skirts, I extended my own hand toward his.

The Indian's face was painted in red and yellow, and was seamed by the suns of many summers and the icy winds of as many winters. His mouth was wide, his lips thin and mobile, but under all this there appeared to be a suppressed mirth or pity and, as I sensed these things, he took my

hand and again said "Hao." I was so weak that I nearly collapsed, but turned and sat down in the doorway. The Chief then said something which I did not of course, understand, but I did know what he meant when he waved his hand toward his men, placed one hand upon his stomach and pointed to his open mouth with the other. They were hungry and asking to be fed. He then drew his butcher knives from a rawhide case at his hip, crossed them and held them high toward the sky, to keep his knives "good," and had I known the sign language, I would have known that I was safe as long as that man was present.

With a stick I drew a circular mark in front of the door in the dust pointing to that and motioning that they must stay outside of that mark. How brave I was becoming. The Chief sat down and waited.

I went inside and got out all the bread we had cut it into slices and cut those in two pieces, in order that the bread might be sufficient to feed all of them. I took down the precious side of bacon which was hanging from a nail driven into a rafter, and cut it into strips. We had no wood then and our coal had not been developed. Our only fuel was "buffalo chips." Nervously, I fried the bacon, placed the cut bread into a dishpan,

the bacon into another dish and took it out to them.

What was my surprise now to discover that there were at least four or five hundred Indians crowded about our little weatherbeaten shack, and more were coming over the hills; horses by the hundreds; women were shouting, and loaded travois covered the level space about the place. Painted faces were pressed against the two little windows and others crowded about the doorway and watched my every movement with great interest. There is something about the giving of "salt and bread" to a stranger, which gives one a certain moral courage--and I experienced this encouragement as I sat in the doorway during that long, hot day, hoping that my doctor husband would appear over the hills. However, he did not return that night and I watched the camp unfold as the women erected their lodges and the painted warriors sent their horses away in one big herd, to seek better pasturage, under the charge of a detail of young men, and I listened to the wild throb of pounding tomtoms and the high ringing voices of the women as they sung for their dancing men folks.

I had had nothing to eat since breakfast. Everything in the shape of food had gone to appease the curiosity and appetites of the Indians.

> Neither did I have any impulse to sleep but in the morning, after many men had shaken hands with me in farewell, and the great camp was in motion and the much prized red scarf which a woman had taken without my consent had disappeared within the cloud of dust which seemed to accompany the moving tribe, and the last body of chanting riders had dropped out of sight behind the southern hill crests, did I realize that I had been living upon my nerves alone. (Stark, pp. 1-4)

Nerve-wracking, terrifying, frightening--contact with the Indians was all this and more, but it was usually not harmful. While women refer to stories of murder and plunder performed by Indians, no first-hand accounts of harmful treatment are given. There was some yelling and whooping and circling of cabins in brightly-colored paint and apparel, no doubt often intended to frighten and harass, but that was the extent of it. Mary Rickett's understated comment about the Indians may sum it up: "Their visits never added any real pleasure to our lives" (Rickett, HDP).

Occasions that did add real pleasure to their lives were holidays, the two most celebrated ones being Christmas and the 4th of July. "When Christmas came that was tops of them all," said Anna Knox Reel. "For days and days we had been counting them [the days], when Christmas eve finally did come, we were so anxious that it seemed we never would get to sleep. . . . One time Father hung up a grain sack to

get all Santa's toys. How we laughed the next morning when all he got was a great big chunk of coal, while our stockings were nicely packed" (Reel, HDP).

Often as not, Christmas was a community thing with half a dozen families from the surrounding area gathering together to celebrate. "We had the only house in the community," recalls Anna Trongrud Lee, so the gatherings were held there, a communal Christmas tree, cut from a nearby slough, decorating the center of the room, trimmed with strings of popcorn and red berries (if available), along with strips of colored paper, beads, buttons, and cotton batten (Lee, Anna, HDP). Each family brought food for all and presents for their own--bright red sleds and rag dolls with hair of yarn and eyes of shor buttons, made by a loving parent, along with a scarf, a pair of mittens, or perhaps a cap. During the evening a program might be held, everyone contributing their skit, after which a molasses-pulling contest might be held. Anna says, "Everyone had a good time" (Lee, Anna, HDP).

Christine Hagen Stafne had vivid memories of bygone Christmases, remembering holidays which were celebrated for two weeks. "These festivities were both religious and social. Eating was so much a part of the social part of Christmas, that weeks had been spent in the preparation of food. The winter's butchering was done before Christmas and Mother prepared all kinds of meat, both pork and beef, which consisted of sausages, ground meat, spareribs, steaks,

roasts, pigs feet, head cheese, sylte and rull. Christmas baking was Fattigmand, Bakkelse, Jule Kage, lefse and flat bröd. Romigröd was a delicacy that many housewives excelled in. The preserves and holiday wine were made from wild chokecherries, plums and grapes" (Stafne, p. 35). Much visiting would occur (weather permitting) during this season, with the family bundling up for a frosty ride in the "bob-sled," often pulled by oxen, across the prairie to a neighbor's house. The children would play outdoors while the grown-ups visited inside, and all would enjoy some hot chocolate before setting off on the return trip home.

The early pioneers did not lose track of the religious significance of the holiday, however. "Weeks before the Christmas holidays, the children met with other children of the congregation and learned their Christmas songs. These practices occured in the church while they stood huddled around the stove which was located in the front of the building. The recitations, duets and songs were proceeded and finished with a precise little bow. . . . The program, as a rule, was length for the children had all learned pieces and the most successful performer was he who recited with loudness and clarity" (Stafne, p. 73). This meant, of course, these pieces were rehearsed at home as well, sung or recited at meal-time devotions, or before going to bed. Christine remembers, "Just before dark on Christmas Eve, the church bells at Bethany would ring. The children would rush outside to hear the bells . . . standing hushed

on a background of snow and frost covered trees listening to the far away tolling of the church bells. . . . After Christmas Eve supper the scriptures were read followed by the childrens poems and carols spoken and sung in front of the Christmas tree. . . . On Christmas Day the settlers gathered for church services . . . and if a minister was unable to reach us, some member of the congregation would direct our Christmas Day worship" (Stafne, pp. 73-74). Then it was to Grandma Hagen's house for Christmas dinner.

Dinner, as well as the holiday festivities surrounding it, were far simpler in many homes, as evidenced by Sarah Steenerson Rustom's recollection. "In Dec. '81," Sarah says, "They were out of coffee, and her father decided he was going to Creel City [later renamed Devils Lake] and get some. He said, 'I am going to have coffee for Xmas if we can't have anything else.' Her father was pretty tired when he got home but it seemed worth the effort to him: 'Anyway I got coffee and sugar, now we can have Hoistads [nearby neighbors] for Xmas.' The day he got back, the 21st of Dec., it started to storm and it stormed for a whole week so they did not have company after all, but Sarah says, 'we were so glad to have coffee and something sweet to eat, that we enjoyed Xmas, even if it did storm for so long" (Rustom, HDP).

The weather was not such a worry for 4th of July celebrations, and celebrate the settlers did, coming from miles around to join in the fun and fellowship. People

would gather at the nearest town, be it Lidgerwood, Carrington, or Devils Lake. Sometimes there was a parade which would disband at the picnic grounds. Here the folks would spend the day, eating, visiting, staging assorted contests like three-legged, potato sack, greased pig, horse, or foot races. A shooting gallery might be set up. Many creeds, many nationalities, and many who could speak no English joined together to celebrate. A reading of the Declaration of Independence was usually a part of the program, as was the singing of "America" and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Later in the day, an open-air dance would be held, lasting until dawn of the next day when tired but happy people would slowly wind their way home.

For those living in or near Devils Lake the 4th of July to remember was the one of 1883, when the train made its first run into Dakota Territory. Oline E. Jorgenson was one of those who was there.

> The day before the fourth they got everything ready, put up a big bunch of roast wild duck and prairie chicken, bread and even baked a cake. They made the trip in the covered wagon and an oxen team. Oline says they were up at four o'clock in the morning and on the road at six. The morning was beautiful, and all the settlers were on their way to Devils Lake. Oline says she will never forget the way Devils Lake looked, covered wagons coming from every direction, and Indians on their ponies,

> all decked out in their bright colors. Oline, nor any of them had ever seen any Indians since coming to D.T. and they didn't know whether to be afraid of them or not, but she says they weren't much funnier than the Norwegian people in their old country clothes. There were lots of Norwegian families, so they heard their own language on every hand. (Jorgenson, Oline, HDP)

Speeches and ceremony and ribbon-cutting were all part of the day's activities, along with the picnic lunch in the park.

Two years later (1884), Mary McMahon Connally witnessed another unique celebration of the 4th in the form of a "sham battle" between the Indian tribes of Fort Totten and Fort Yates. "The Indians were in full war dress and, with loud shouts and war shoops and much flourishing of weapons, they gave a very real imitation of Indian battles of yore, some not so far in the past either" (Connally, HDP). As it happened, this event had a tragic ending, with the interpreter being shot and killed by one of the Indians who supposedly were all carrying guns loaded with blank cartridges.

Unusual though such circumstances were, pioneer women were used to tragic endings, death not being confined to mock battlefields. Death was a familiar figure, a fairly constant companion who visited their homes regularly. The causes were many, the antidotes few. Childbirth, disease,

accidents--all took a heavy toll and touched the lives of nearly every pioneer woman and her family. Clara Bassett died ten days after the birth of her twelfth child in 1897 (Coulter, HDP). Julia Sandgren, at the age of 31, was left a widow with six children to raise, the oldest of whom was thirteen years (Sandgren, HDP). Emma Mandt Gronle's "first child was Sophie, born February 2, 1885. Theodore Oliver was born December 23, 1886, and died April 1, 1889. Another son was born October 25, 1889 and also named Theodore Oliver. This boy died January 11, 1895" (Gronle, HDP). Life and death passed each other going in and out the door.

Inge Quarum joined her husband in America in 1874, two years after her husband John had left Norway to seek his fortune. Their 2 1/2 year-old daughter contracted scarlet fever shortly after arrival and died. "Mr. Quarum made a coffin for her. Mrs. Quarum washed her and got her ready and placed her in the coffin. Mr. Quarum had to pull her on a little sled to the burial place five or six miles away. Mrs. Quarum could not walk that far and had to be left at home alone. It was very hard for her to see them go thus. She stood in the window looking as he went" (Quarum, HDP).

Few families were spared. "It was in 1879 that the diphtheria came to our place and we lost James and Emma from it. It was so pitiful to watch those little ones. When they died they just choked and there I stood and could not help them. I shall never forget them," remarks Catherine Johnson (Johnson, Catherine, HDP). Her brothers,

Absalom and Lee, lost two boys and a little girl respectively to whooping cough in 1886.

In the spring of 1888, scarlet fever hit the Mandan area, and the three small children of Sina Miller Sakariasson were stricken and died within a week. "It was a terrible epidemic," remembers Sina, "and few of the children who contracted the disease were saved. Hardly a day passed without the funeral of some little child" (Sakariasson, HDP).

The funerals were simple affairs, sometimes with the service of a minister, sometimes not. But the early settlers did the best they could with what they had to provide a proper burial. Nellie Van Meter Cousins recalls the first funeral she attended in Dakota Territory the summer of 1883. "It was for a little girl named Lucy Dodd, the daughter of a neighbor. There was no undertaker or provision of any kind for taking care of the dead in those first years so the little girl's father built her a small wooden casket which her mother lined with ruffled net, an old dress of other days, which she cut and fitted into the small casket making it look lovely. There were no flowers that time of the summer so they took potato blossoms, the only blossom available, and covered the entire casket with them. It was as lovely as anything Nellie had seen" (Cousins, HDP). The Quams loaded their lifeless three-year-old daughter, a measles victim, into the back of their wagon, and drove to town where the wife of a Methodist minister, Mrs. Ezra Healey, preached a short sermon over the third

grave in the Drayton cemetary" (Quam, HDP). A neighbor woman, Mrs. Christ Peaton, helped deliver Mary and Kate Padden's mother of her last child, which died shortly thereafter. Mrs. Peaton baptized the baby, as there was no priest there, and they buried the baby in the yard (Maresh/Padden, HDP).

Gertrude Woodley McCumber was nursing a baby of her own when Laura Patrican, a close neighbor, gave birth to her first child as her husband lay dying beside her, the result of a plowing accident. So grief-stricken was Laura that she refused to nurse her newborn daughter at first, and Gertrude assumed the job of wet nurse until such time as Laura was able to attend to her own child (McCumber, HDP).

If not in the throes of grief themselves, pioneer women often were empathetic witnesses to others' misfortune. "One of the saddest visitors I had at that time [the birth of her first child in 1883] was Mrs. Christine Boudette. She was one of my closest friends and neighbors in those early years. I shall never forget the little woman as she held Albert in her arms while the tears streamed down her face. The memory of the death of her six children during a diphtheria epidemic was still recent with her, and I can still see her walking home to the quietness and loneliness of a cabin which had once been the home of those she held most dear" (Stafne, pp. 44-45).

Life and death were juxtaposed, and the truth contained in the poet's words was poignantly visible:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose;
A time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time of war, and a time of peace.

(Eccl. iii.1-8)

Time passed, and the memories--the happy and the sad ones--of people and places on a sparsely populated prairie were all held most dear in the hearts and minds of the women who lived those memories. The years went by quickly. The homesteads became farms; the children grew up; the pioneers grew old along with their husbands. Upon the death of Erick

Stafne, Christine moved in with her daughter Anna who lived in Moorhead, Minnesota, making frequent visits to the "old place." Finally, the decision was made to give it up.

The summer of 1928 was a busy one, for I worked hard at sorting and packing. During those forty-five years on the farm, that we had called home, things had accumulated. It was hard to discard the little useless articles for sentimental reasons, and I tried to divide things evenly among the children. After getting rid of most of the furniture, I began to make plans for the fall and winter.

On September 19, 1928 I boarded the Great Northern train at Fargo, which was to take me west to Seattle, Washington. I was physically tired after a busy summer, for my boxes were now stored and my trunks on the train. I could sit back and relax. Somehow it was not a happy trip, for the goodbyes of those on the platform stayed with me and my mind kept going back over the years. I was leaving the Red River Valley which had been my home for nearly sixty years. Those years had been years of changes. Changes which this generation has accepted. The highly mechanized farm machinery and power is a long way from the crudely built farm plows, harrows and oxen power. Electricity which has revolutionized farm

> labor is taken for granted. The homemade dipped candles of my youth were just a beginning light toward farm conveniences. Radio, automobiles, railroads, airplanes, telephones, telegraph, silent movies, recordings are all services which we gradually become accustomed to. The untold development and progress of future inventions will be the story of a new era of which my generation will have no part. As I traveled over the State of North Dakota, I was reminded of the Empire Builder for which our train was named. I marveled at the accomplishments of man for in fifty years the prairies had become inhabited. . . .
> (Stafne, pp. 75-76)

There is a certain irony in concluding a paper devoted to pioneer women and their manifold contributions with a quote marveling at the accomplishments of "man." On the other hand, it pointedly illustrates the extent to which the woman's role in this pioneering effort was subsumed into one of masculine endeavor. Even the principals involved--the many Christines who toiled alongside their husbands, brothers, and fathers to build a new home in a new land--hesitated to take the appropriate share of the credit for what had been accomplished.

And so it has been up until very recently that those telling the story, whether through a historical, literary, or dramatic medium, have ignored, overlooked, or minimized

the partnership that pioneering was, generic intent notwithstanding. And so it is that the diaries, letters, and reminiscences supply not only evidence of women's contributions to this pioneering effort but also a unique and personalized account of the homesteading experience, the laughter and the tears, the hope and the despair--an intimate chronicle of what it was like "to make a prairie" inhabitable.

What began as a project to fulfill the requirements of a master's degree has become a consuming interest to me. Feeling enriched by the personal glimpses of these women's lives, I recognize the desirability and the urgency of preserving as much of the material contained in diaries, letters, and journals as possible. In the past, not a great deal of value was placed in their preservation. Families tossed such items in a bottom drawer, or on a back shelf, and forgot about them. Or worse yet, they threw them out in a flurry of housecleaning or a move. It has only been in the last five or ten years, with increased nostalgic interest that an appreciation for the past has become popular. There is a renewed attempt to trace one's roots in addition to the funding of a number of oral history projects aimed at capturing the thoughts and feelings of persons who can validate an experience by having lived it. It is my hope that the story told herein, a story with a host of characters, offers ample evidence that diaries, letters, and journals do indeed offer valuable insights and a human

dimension to, in this instance, the settling of an unsettled land. It is also my hope that as the word goes out, people will make a special effort to see that such material is stored in safe yet accessible places in order that others might share the experiences these pioneer women have recorded in an intimate and personal way.

NOTES

[1] Robert S. Athearn's High Country Empire and Marshall B. Davidson's Life in America offer random examples of the emphasis placed on the male perspective in recording the pioneering experience.

[2] Theodore C. Blegen's Minnesota: A History of the State and Arlow W. Anderson's The Salt of the Earth illustrate the point there was uneven coverage of the contributions made by male and female pioneers, with women receiving considerably less space and attention.

[3] The Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota, January 1917, Vol. 7, No. 2, contains an article entitled "Mitigating Rural Isolation," by John Morris Gillette. Fifteen years later (Fall, 1932), an article entitled "Fannie Heath--'Flower Woman of North Dakota,'" by her daughter, Pearl Heath Frazer, appeared in the same publication. A random search thereafter of the Journal does not reveal any material on the subject of pioneer women individually or collectively, and their contributions to the movement westward.

[4] This material gathered during the 1930's by Works Progress Administration (WPA) field workers for the

Historical Data Project, hereinafter referred to as HDP, is stored in manila folders and filed alphabetically in cardboard boxes in the archives of the State Historical Society at Bismarck, North Dakota. Each recollection is in a separate folder, is labeled with the individual's name, and averages about ten pages in length. While there are approximately 1500 accounts by pioneer men as well as the nearly 700 accounts by pioneer women, I have examined only the women's collections for the purposes of this paper.

[5] A note contained in the catalog listing of the Manuscript Collections of State Historical Society under Canfield, Sarah Elizabeth, B6.

[6] Many of the quotations contained herein have irregularities in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Rather than marking obvious irregularities with the editorial [sic] which would be cumbersome and rather than regularizing them silently, I have chosen to present the text as it is in order to give the reader and possible subsequent researchers a text both accurate and conveying the flavor of the originals. In any case, where there are transcriptions, the irregularities or errors might be those of the field workers rather than the original writers or oral informers.

[7] Notes on the Imprisonment of William H. Larrabee at Fort Totten in 1876 by Frank E. Vyzralek, Archivist, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Nov. 16, 1972, B103.

[8] This definition is taken from the following source: Morris, William, ed., The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1976 edition.

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